

Yesterday, Tomorrow and Everything Inbetween

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Yesterday, Tomorrow and Everything Inbetween

by [FoxDevil](#)

Summary

After Techno broke Dream out of prison and nursed him back to health – physically, at least – Dream finds himself on the steps of Kinoko Kingdom where he is found by Karl. Instead of turning him in, Karl notices that something isn't quite right and gives Dream shelter. It opens up a stony path full of struggling and pain and maybe trying to heal old wounds.

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Angst. A lot of Dream angst and hurt. And comfort.

Notes

This is my first fanfiction I'm uploading on ao3 so don't be too hard on me haha
Be prepared for a lot of hurt and angst. Poor Dream is going to suffer, a lot. There will also be comfort but it has to get worse before it gets better :)

I will put trigger warnings on every single chapter. The first one doesn't have any big TW in it but if I missed anything let me know.

Also, big thank you to my editor [Lovii](#)! They have a few amazing fanfics as well so you should definitely check their account out - especially if you are interested in more Dream Angst.

Chapter 1

“Where is he?”

His tone was as icy as the November wind that still clung to his coat as he came rushing into the room.

Karl immediately jumped up from where he had been sitting on one of the big couches in the living room, hands stretched outwards in a weak attempt to soothe Sapnap’s flaming anger.

Karl knew this would happen; had spent the entire day thinking about how to best approach this, trying to craft together a half-decent explanation. He knew his fiancé, knew his tamper. And in the end he had come to the conclusion that this day would not end without a big collision.

“Sapnap, wait-”

“No, where the fuck is he!”

There was a raging fire in Sapnap’s eyes that burned brighter than the flames he was born from. But under the inferno of red fury and orange hatred, Karl could see pale yellow desperation.

“I will show you where he is but I need you to calm down first.”

“So he *is* here? What the fuck, Karl.”

“I can explain-” Karl said, trying to calm down his partner. Just because there was no way around a collision didn’t mean he couldn’t try to soften the crash. But Sapnap didn’t even let him finish the sentence.

“Have you lost your mind? Have you suddenly forgotten everything that happened? Do you even realize-”

“Shut!” Karl winced internally. He didn’t like to be this harsh but he needed Sapnap to at least listen. “You can be angry at me as much as you want. But at least shut up for a second and let me explain.”

Sapnap was about to protest but the way his lovers eyes melted into a pleading look made his words tie around his tongue and stop the rest of his outburst from bleeding out of his heated heart that burned from a disgusting mix of betrayal and confusion and hurt. He knew Karl would never actively do something to upset him without a good reason but that didn’t mean he wasn’t allowed to be furious.

Sapnap’s sudden silence gave Karl the chance to continue, “This morning, I went out to get some of the mushrooms that grow down at the tree line. I wanted to make George his favorite stew because he wasn’t feeling so well.” He shuffled around on his feet, trying to ease the tension and ball of nervousness in his chest. “I found him right outside the border of Kinoko Kingdom. My first thought was to call Sam and bring him back to prison, I swear. But...”

His fingers were nervously fidgeting with the hem of his sweater, not knowing how to express his inner turmoil. Ever since finding him next to the entrance of one of the small ponds right outside Kinoko Kingdom, his body had been buzzing with nauseating, restless anxiety. And he couldn’t pinpoint if it was because it was *him* or because of the state he’d been in when he had found him.

“I don’t know how to explain it but I think there is something wrong with him.”

A humorless chuckle climbed its way up Sapnap’s throat. “You think there is something wrong with him? Karl, you are talking about the man who joined two of the most famous anarchists to destroy a whole nation. He manipulated and traumatized *children*. He had a room filled with our attachments like some sick, fucked up, twisted form of a collector. He hurt his friends, his family like it meant nothing to him. He hurt *us*. So yes, Karl, you are right. There is definitely something wrong with Dream. But it doesn’t take a genius to figure that out.”

Sapnap had run out of breath at the end, his words raw from emotions that took their roots in sleepless nights tormented by nightmares and weeks spent in bed because his heart was too heavy, weighing down his body and making it impossible to even move an arm.

And Karl understood. Because he’d been there, guiding Sapnap through bad weeks and days that were even worse than the last. He’d brought him breakfast to bed, had made sure that Sapnap had enough food and water in him, had washed the sheets and cleaned the house without complaining. When Sapnap’s head had been aching from guilt of being this affected by a person that he shouldn’t care about anymore because *he* didn’t care either, Karl’d been at his side, whispering empty words into his ears that meant nothing and everything at the same time.

Karl understood and Sapnap knew and right now that was the only thing keeping his insanity in check, holding him back from tearing down the whole kingdom to find Dream and take his last live.

“I didn’t forget about any of that, I promise,” Karl said softly. “But when I found Dream, he...he looked like a cornered animal. He was shaking so badly. As if he was afraid of me.”

Sapnap scoffed, folding his arms across his chest. “Yeah, because he was scared you would lock him back up again. Something you should have done, by the way.”

“No, Dream is not scared. Ever. Even when they led him to the prison he didn’t show any emotions. You know him, Sapnap.”

“Do I? Because the Dream I know doesn’t manipulate and terrorize and hurt people he loves. Do you think I don’t want him back? Because I do. I really want him back.” He drew in a shaky breath, trying and failing to compose himself.

“But I want *our* Dream back. The Dream who used to stay up until late into the night to chase away any mobs that could hurt us. The Dream who loved to take his horse out on long trips because it calmed him down when his head got the best of him again. The Dream who was the only one willing to put up with the constant fighting between George and me. The Dream who sacrificed everything to find a place for him and his friends to stay, to be safe and free.”

He tried to keep his voice as steady as possible but the tears in his eyes threatened to expose him. He hadn’t been able to cry in a very long time, and the sobs that caught in his chest shocked him. He bit his lip, didn’t allow himself to spill a single tear over a man who had ripped his heart out and tossed it away without a second thought. He hadn’t cried in months and he wouldn’t start now. Not for *him*. Never again.

“Prime, I want him back so badly it hurts. But our Dream died a long time ago. And I made peace with that. I moved on.” *Liar*. “So why can’t you do the same? Why did you have to bring him here out of all places?”

Karl gave him a sad smile, “He may not be the same Dream you used to know. But I don’t think he is the same Dream who did all those horrible things, either. Something isn’t right. Something happened to him.”

He stepped forward, having kept his distance during Sapnap’s rant, knowing when his fiancé needed his space and when he needed a comforting hug. He raised his arm, laying his hand on Sapnap’s shoulder in a silent, grounding solace. “I need you to trust me with this one, Sap. Please. Let him stay. Only for a while. If he tries anything, we will send him straight back to prison.”

“If I don’t kill him first.”

“Sapnap.”

Hesitation kept Sapnap’s tongue under control for a moment but the determination in Karl’s eyes made him carve in. “Okay. I trust you. But if he acts up in any way – doesn’t matter how small – we will call Sam. Immediately.”

Karl nodded, relief making his body boneless and he leaned onto Sapnap, crushing him with a tight hug, giving him comfort as much as soothing his own anxious heart. “Thank you.”

There was a soft pause, Sapnap finally taking off his hunter attire and putting his bow and axe away, sinking deeper into Karl’s embrace.

“Does George know?” Sapnap carefully disturbed the comfortable silence after a while.

“He knows. He’s asleep in his room at the moment.”

“Of course.” Sapnap didn’t mean to let the words slip from his mouth. They left a bitter taste of guilt and sorrow behind. It wasn’t George’s fault that his mind sought for a reality only his dreams could ever provide. And could Sapnap really blame him? Not while desperately trying to shove down the blazing jealousy; jealousy of George for being able to turn back time at night. Meanwhile all he saw when he closed his eyes, was blood strained hands and a lifeless body under the blade of his very own sword.

“*Is he like him?*” Sapnap had asked him one starless night in front of a camp fire, a stupid tradition back from the manhunt days that none of them had the heart to break. It was more about the sentiment and nostalgia nowadays than anything else.

“*Who?*”

“*You know...in your dreams. Is he...*”

“*As if not a single day has passed since we founded these lands.*”

Sapnap didn’t know what he expected when he opened the door to the guestroom that Karl had insisted on putting right next to the stairs even though they had rarely any visitors, much less people that stayed a whole night.

The room wasn’t that big but Karl had put his whole heart into it to give it a feeling of comfort and warmth. Soft spring light fell through the glass of a big window on the opposite side of the door.

The pale lilac curtains were pushed to the side, giving away to a view of evergreen trees and flower covered meadows. A poorly handcrafted desk had been pushed against the dark oak wall to the right, a fluffy carpet covered the floor like cyan moss.

And then there was the bed to Sapnap's left.

For a moment he just stood there, frozen in the door frame, and looked at him. Because, oh, he didn't have his mask on. And all he could do was stare. Because this was the face of his best friend, his brother, the lost child Bad had found between the ruins of a burned down village so many suns ago, the boy he grew up with.

He was wearing one of Karl's oversized hoodies that looked too big, even on him. Karl must be drowning in it.

He still had the same messy, dirty blond hair, the same crooked nose, the same endless freckles on pale skin. But he'd gotten older, jaw more defined than Sapnap remembered it, the first few stubbles of a beard visible, more scars ripping through his face. One scar on the bridge of his nose, another one from his neck up to his chin, a big one from his eyebrow down to his cheek. There were other, smaller ones but these were the ones that stood out the most, almost taunting Sapnap, laughing at him, reminding him of the time that had passed.

He didn't even remember the last time Dream had taken off his mask around him or George. He used to do it all the time back when they were younger. And then, some day, he just stopped.

Amber tinted eyes met speckled green ones. George used to point out how similar they looked to Eyes of Ender. Now, Sapnap couldn't help but notice the gray hue that lay upon them like autumn fog. They looked tired, exhausted.

"If you are here to kill me, do it quick." His voice used to be cool creek water flowing over pebbles, now it sounded like stone dragging over stone, rough and hoarse.

"What?" Sapnap breathed out, taken aback by the blunt words of the other man.

"I am not stupid, Sap. I heard you yell at Karl earlier and I also know you haven't forgotten about your promise. So, when you kill me, at least make it painless. I don't want to think about *him* in my last moments here on earth." Dream let out a dry chuckle that sounded like it dragged across his throat painfully.

It made the anger in Sapnap's core flare back up. It was as if Dream didn't take any of this serious, as if he found it more amusing than anything else- as if it was nothing more than a tasteless joke to him.

It didn't come as a surprise but it hurt nonetheless. Karl had been wrong. Dream hadn't changed one bit.

"I will not kill you."

That got Dream's attention. His whole body went rigid, face unreadable.

"You are going to send me back to prison?" If Sapnap didn't know any better, he'd say it was fear that weighed down on Dream's voice.

"No." Dream's tense posture relaxed slightly.

“For the record, Karl is the only reason why you are here right now. He’s naive and foolish, said you changed or whatever. I,” Sapnap said, tone a void of any emotions, “however, am not that stupid. The moment you act out or give me any reason to think that you are up to something, I won’t hesitate to end you. Like you said, I did not forget about my promise. And I am not afraid to follow through with it. Right now, the only thing holding me back is Karl. Understood?”

Dream nodded, flinching away from his stern tone . Sapnap ignored it, didn’t care that the other man’s hands were trembling, how he recoiled every time Sapnap raised his voice just a tad . He didn’t care because he was not an idiot. This was nothing but an act, a desperate attempt of Dream to convince Sapnap that he wasn’t the brutal tyrant Sapnap knew he was, a fruitless effort to avoid the prison or the promise . But Sapnap could see through it, would not let himself be fooled.

Some people did not deserve a second chance.

“Here,” he crouched down, putting the plate of food and glass of water he’d awkwardly been holding the entire time, on the ground. “From Karl.”

Dream didn’t make any move to get up. He just sat there on the bed, eyeing the meal with a mix of hunger and distrust .

“Unfortunately, Karl did not poison the food. You can eat it.” Sapnap snorted at the side glance Dream gave him. He looked like a cat that someone had pissed off, definitively not threatening or dangerous in any way.

That’s what he wants you to believe. Don’t let him fool you. He could still kill you in your sleep tonight.

Sapnap didn’t know where Dream had been for the last few months after escaping prison but he looked only a bit slimmer than he used to be before the Vault. There was no doubt that Dream still had the ability to kill someone with his bare hands. Even after spending eight months locked in a cell, the last few months after the prison break seemed to have given him back most of the strength he must’ve lost while locked up. Sapnap had the unsettling suspicion that Techno had something to do with that.

He would have to lock Dream in the room before going to bed tonight.

An uncomfortable silence filled the room. Neither of the men, once upon a time brothers, now nothing more than strangers, dared to break eye contact first.

There were so many unspoken words but at the same time it felt like not enough.

Dream opened his mouth to say something. Maybe an apology, maybe a threat or a mockery. Whatever it was, Sapnap never got to hear it, for Dream closed his mouth again without making a sound and looked down on his still shaking hands. Sapnap just scoffed.

He was almost out of the door, when Dream finally spoke up. His voice was quiet, timid, almost as if he was scared that Sapnap would snap at him for saying something out loud.

“I don’t want to be here, either. Karl insisted on me staying. He didn’t let me leave. If it was on me, I would be long gone.”

Sapnap didn’t say anything, letting the door shut behind him and lock fall into place.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Dream is struggling. And a trip to the kitchen does not end well.

TW: mentioning of abuse, mentioning of nausea, unhealthy eating habits, dissociation/derealization, self destructive thoughts, unintentional self-harm due to feeling overwhelmed (it's very minor though)

Chapter Notes

It's been years since I last uploaded my work anywhere and that was in my native language and on a different website (we don't talk about that tho, I disowned every fanfic I've written back then) so seeing so many people leave kudos and comments and subscriptions or even just click on my work is both terrifying and exciting at the same time. Thank you so much!

Days passed by his window like the leaves of the cherry tree in front of his room and Dream just sat there and watched. The falling leaves reminded him of the snow back at Techno's cabin. During his recovery he used to sit on the front porch for hours, staring up at the white flakes weeping down from the sky. It was calming and often enough Techno would find him late in the evening, dead asleep and huddled in a fluffy blanket in the middle of a snow covered landscape.

The first few days in Kinoko Kingdom, Dream hadn't left the bed. He had fallen into a familiar swamp again and this time he didn't have anyone to pull him out. Only Karl who had brought him food and water ever single day, making sure that he at least didn't starve to death.

Karl was nice and Dream hated it because that had been the reason why he even ended up on the steps of Kinoko Kingdom in the first place.

After Techno had returned the favor and broken him out of prison, Dream had believed that that was the end of their alley ship, thought he would have to find a way to survive on his own now that the debt was repaired and there was no reason for Techno to stay by his side anymore. But Techno had refused to let him go, had nursed him back to health – physically, at least – and given him a place to stay, to heal, to rest.

It had ripped Dream apart, *was* ripping him apart; the guilt of people still being kind to him despite him being nothing more than a burden. He didn't understand, didn't deserve being treated like this. Every day that Karl came into his room to deliver a meal, Dream expected him to snap, to scream at him, to hit him, to do anything other than smile at him with these sad eyes that told him that Karl knew.

He hated it, couldn't stand it, would rather take bruises on his skin and agony in his veins over whatever this was. It made Dream's body tense up in constant anxiety and anticipation that the next day would bring the awaited pain. But it never came.

Karl had tried to talk to him a couple of times, had seen the way Dream flinched away from loud noises and abrupt movements, how he barely talked and only spoke up when directly addressed, how he was carefully to never show any patch of skin besides his face and hands. But Dream had ignored him and the offer of help, something that was still so foreign to him.

Dream pulled the hood of one of Karl's oversized hoodies over his head, trying and failing to hide his neck, the only place the piece of cloth unfortunately didn't hide. He felt Karl's eyes on the collar-shaped scars every time the older thought Dream wasn't looking. It made his skin crawl, made him feel too exposed and vulnerable. He hated it.

Dream liked to sit on the window sill in his room (*not your room, not your home*) and look through the glass separating him from the rest of the world.

Sometimes he thought too much. And he came to the conclusion that, different from the bittersweet lyrics of Wilbur's song or Niki's honey glass literature, the poets loved to fill his story with twisted irony and dark paradoxes. For he commissioned the prison, he would perish his sins in the box of unforgiveness; for he spent sunrise after sunrise clawing at the walls of his confinement, after he was finally free he would seek small, locked off places for the sick satisfactions of a familiar feeling.

And after some time, he learned to laugh along with the poets. It was funny, kind of, in a way that it wasn't.

There was something oddly comforting about being in this room. He felt secure, safe. No one came here other than Karl. Not even Sapnap or George.

Sometimes he could see them from his window when the sun climbed up all the way to the top of the sky. The two would walk out onto one of the meadows in front of Kinoko Kingdom and practice combo and train together.

And every time, memories would flash through Dream's mind like glass shards. And every single time, he cut himself on them.

It was one of these times that Dream had made himself comfortable on the big window sill again, head leaning against the glass that was warm from the strays of sunlight breaking through. A comfortable, lazy silence hung in the air and Dream bathed in it.

Sapnap and George were out on the fields again and Dream had to stifle a little giggle when George accidentally dropped his axe, resulting in Sapnap winning the round. He could practically hear George pouting.

This was nice, Dream decided. And for a moment he allowed himself to fall into the chasm of a past he had thought to be long gone. The friendship with Sapnap and George had always been easy, despite messy fights and big arguments, they had never stayed mad at the others for more than a few hours.

He liked to believe that fate didn't exist; that they *choose* this friendship. That it was their own

actions and decisions that led them to each other. No destiny or leap of faith, just the three of them, growing into a friendship, slowly and yet so quickly at the same time. It had been their hands, placing the seeds of friendship into the frozen soil of a winter's morning, not knowing if they would survive. They had watched over the seeds, had given them water and light. They had been patient. And when spring had finally arrived, they had been there, when the roots of their friendship grew and leaves sprouted. Although sometimes they had lost their flowers due to cold days and rain, they had always grown back.

Though, he supposed, a flower could not survive when you ripped it out by its roots.

Dream watched Sapnap and George spar until the sun left nothing behind but a pale golden hue on the horizon. One time, he swore he saw George's eyes flicker his way. It had only been a split second and Dream wasn't sure if he hadn't imagined it.

When the night crawled closer, Dream observed as Karl stepped out of one of the tall buildings that gave Kinoko Kingdom life. He approached George and Sapnap, saying something Dream couldn't hear. The other two nodded, collecting their training weapons and following Karl back to their house.

Dream sat still for another hour, waiting until his entire room was soaked in complete darkness before hesitantly standing up.

When Karl had brought him his food this noon he'd told Dream that he would have to get dinner himself this evening. Rationally, Dream knew that Karl was just trying to coax him out of his room for once but he hadn't listened to the logical side of his brain for quiet some time. The thought of having to leave the safety of his room and face Sapnap, face *George*, terrified him. The tremor in his hands picked up again and his stomach churned uncomfortably. He felt like throwing up.

He listened to any potential noises coming from outside, making sure that Karl, George and Sapnap had already finished eating and were hopefully already upstairs in their rooms, before slowly opening the door to his room for the first time in a week.

The hallway in front of him was empty and dark and cold. He drew the sleeves of Karl's hoodie down as much as possible, hugging himself in a useless attempt to get back a little bit of the warmth of his room and comfort of the small space.

Out here in the hall, everything was too open, too big. He didn't like it.

Dream let go of a shaky breath. Careful not to step on any floor boards that might creak, he made his way to where he believed the kitchen was. With every step his heart took a leap forward. He felt uncomfortably hot and cold at the same time. He should've stayed in his room, should've let himself be hungry for one night. It wasn't like the feeling of starving felt foreign to him, anyway.

But it was already too late to go back. He had reached the kitchen, soft lighting flowed out from underneath the door.

Someone was in the kitchen. *Someone was in the kitchen, someone was in the kitchen.*

Heart almost beating as fast as it had the night of his escape, he spun around, ready to run back to his room and hide under the covers of his bed for the rest of the night. But as it seemed, the

universe liked to toy with him a little bit more because the moment his back was to the door, it was opened and he felt the presence of another person behind him. The adrenaline and fear burned brighter than blaze powder ever could.

He hated eye contact but he hated not being able to see the other person even more so he turned back around, gaze locking with his opponent.

“What are you doing here.” No venom, no hatred. But no kindness or warmth, either.

That was okay. He could deal with that. It was better than the forbearance and courtesy he got from Karl.

“I asked him to come and get his food himself tonight, Sap. Let him be.” The outline of a second person appeared behind Sapnap, pushing him back into the kitchen. Karl gave him a gentle smile that felt like poison on Dream’s skin. “Come on in. We already ate but there is a plate of food for you on the kitchen counter.”

Seeing Dream hesitate, Karl grabbed his arm and pulled him into the room. He softened his grip when Dream flinched, hiding away behind his hoodie.

Dream could see the mushroom stew waiting for him, right next to George who was sitting on one of the bar chairs at the kitchen island.

Dream’s shoulders drew up and his gaze fell down to the ground. George wasn’t looking at him but he could feel Sapnap’s eyes on him. He was much taller than him, but in that moment he felt smaller than ever.

Glancing over, Karl gave him two encouraging thumbs up.

Warily, trying to make as few noises as possible, he moved forward, eyes cast back to the ground. The distance between him and the bowl of food seemed endless and when he finally reached the counter top, the nausea threatened to move up his throat. He was hardly hungry anymore.

Despite the sickening feeling in his stomach, he stretched his arm out to pick up the stew. Karl had gone through all the trouble to make him something to eat. The least he could do was accept his hospitality, as foreign and wrong as it might feel.

What he didn’t calculate was the tremors that seemed to have his hands in a death grip. The moment he lifted the bowl away from the safety of the stable kitchen island, the wooden carved dish slipped through his fingers like it was nothing more than sand passing through. Soup spilled across the hard stone floor that split a crack into the side of the bowl.

Dream could only stand there, frozen in place, shock and terror etched into his face.

“What the fuck!” Dream flinched back so hard he hit his back at the edge of the kitchen counter. Dull pain spread across his skin but he barely felt it, his entire focus on Sapnap who looked at him with a mixture of annoyance and fury. “You really think you can just come here, to *our* Kingdom, and make yourself a home, eat *our* food and sleep in *our* bed and then just go around and break things?”

“Calm down, it was an accident-”

“Stay out of this, Karl. You can’t tell me this bitch is too stupid to even pick up a fucking bowl. This was a mistake.”

And for the first time, George looked at Dream. Really looked at him, brows furrowed but

expression otherwise unreadable. Dream was the first to break eye contact.

“He literally didn’t leave his room for *days* and the first thing he does when he comes out is break something.”

You fucked up. You ruined everything, like you always do. They will send you back to prison where you belong, the voices chanted and Dream agreed.

The longer Sapnap yelled at him, the less the hateful words managed to reach his mind, muddled and hazy from panic.

Don’t bring me back there, please. Don’t bring me back to him. I can’t do this again, he thought. *I won’t survive it a second time.*

He felt funny, floaty. His body didn’t belong to him anymore. He hardly felt the sting from where his fingernails had dug into the palms of his hands. He was still looking at Sapnap, could see his lips moving, but the words didn’t register. Instead, the wind whirling around the facade of the house seemingly picked up, drowning out every other noise around him. A familiar feeling of detachment overcame him and he let go.

The next time he blinked, he was alone.

He didn’t know how much time had passed but his body still didn’t feel right, his feet seemed way bigger than they should be and he didn’t recognize his own hands. He was dazed, everything around him felt strangely distorted.

He tried to ground himself with different breathing techniques Phil had taught him, disorientated stumbling out of the kitchen and back to his room.

Distantly, he felt a dull pain in his chest, right over his heart. He wasn’t surprised that Sapnap and George weren’t in the kitchen anymore but the fact that not even Karl had stayed hurt for a reason Dream couldn’t explain. It wasn’t like Karl was entitled to be there for him, to comfort him. He was already doing way more than he should with letting Dream stay in his house.

Back in his room, he fell down onto his knees right next to his bed. After so many months he was still trying to get used to sleeping on a soft mattress. There had been multiple instances in which Techno had found him curled up on the hard floor with a nothing but the thinnest pillow under his head. It was one of his habits Techno hadn’t be able to get completely rid off, something that had engraved itself so deeply into Dream’s routine that his back would ache from lying on a soft surface, too used to the cruel, stony obsidian ground of the prison.

It gave him comfort in a way. The obsidian had been the only stable thing in his cell; despite endless visits and brutal torture sessions, it had always been there, never caving in, giving him a stable place to lean onto when his legs wouldn’t carry him any longer.

He pulled down one of the blankets from his bed, hiding underneath the thick fabric, blocking out the world as he lay down on the ground of his room, focusing only on his breathing and nothing else.

This time the silence wasn’t uncomfortable or terrifying but gave him a feeling of safety and security.

The night moved on and it continued being quiet until someone softly knocked on the door.

“Dream? It’s me, Karl.”

Dream didn’t answer.

“I just wanted to say I’m sorry for Sapnap’s behavior and just leaving you in the kitchen like that. I had to go make sure Sapnap was alright after storming off.”

He didn’t try to get into the room, which was impossible, anyway, since Dream had locked himself in but Dream appreciated Karl’s awareness of his boundaries and personal space nonetheless. Despite knowing that there was something wrong with him and trying to get him out of his shell, the older man never pressured Dream into doing or saying something he didn’t want. Dream was forever grateful for that.

“I hope you are doing okay. You seemed pretty startled when Sapnap yelled at you. I mean... obviously you were but...” Karl paused. Dream could hear him shuffle around in front of the door.

“I made you a new meal, in case you were still hungry. I will just put it right here next to your door and you can come out and pick it up when I’m gone.”

Dream didn’t respond.

“Okay,” Karl said. His voice sounded so gentle, so soft. And Dream didn’t know what on earth he did to deserve his kindness.

“Goodnight, Dream.”

Muffled footsteps moved away from the door. Then it was quiet again.

“Goodnight, Karl.”

He did not eat that night.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Dream's sleep is haunted by nightmares. But after a week, he finally feels ready to leave his room and go outside. While exploring Kinoko's surroundings, he stumbles into someone.

Chapter Notes

Don't mind me, I'm just really bad at making summaries.

Anygag, I had an exam today and had to study for the past few days so sorry for not uploading sooner. I actually have 10 chapters already finished but I'm not really satisfied with a few chapters yet so the next upload depends on how fast I can appease my never ending need to criticize everything I do and create. I will try to upload the next chapter in the next couple of days tho.

TW: nightmares, dehumanization, abuse, mentioning of torture, blood

It was cold in the cell, freezing and not even the heat of the lava could chase away the chills. Or maybe that was because of the blood loss.

...Definitely the blood loss.

Dream leaned backwards as much as the chains around his limbs allowed him to, knees digging into the hard, unforgiving obsidian stone underneath him.

"Aw, is my puppy scared?" The collar around his neck tightened. He suppressed a wince, knowing that showing the pain inflicted on him in any way would only fuel the embers of Quackity's sick fascination of hurting him even more.

Quackity took a few steps back, gaze running over Dream's cowered body in front of him. There was a dark glint in his eyes that made Dream's stomach churn in unease and nausea. Albeit, that didn't stop him from leaning into the touch when Quackity lifted his hand up to his cheek, whimpering slightly when the man's hand stroked damp skin, slick from tears and blood and sweat.

"What are we going to do with you today, hm?" It was almost lovingly, gentle. "How about you choose today."

He couldn't stop the whine that left his dry lips when Quackity pulled his hand away, turning around to the sets of tools he had laid out in front of him like a collection of prized jewelry. His hand glided over the handle of a hammer, up to the blades of a shear and back down to stroke the sharp edge of a dagger. "What are we feeling up to, Daydream?"

Dream clenched his jaw, refusing to answer.

Suddenly, fingers tangled themselves in the filthy strands of his hair that had taken on a shade of brown over the months of being here, dried blood and dirt darkening what used to be a light dirty blonde. The fingers yanked back his head, harshly tucking at his scalp and making him bite back a yelp.

“I was talking to you, mutt. What did I say about answering me when I tell you to?”

The thing about Quackity was that his emotions were as fragile as a leaf facing the front of a summer storm. If you weren't careful enough his good mood could flick over to pure rage in seconds. And Dream had been on the receiving end of said rage more times than he could count. It would be a lie if he said that after spending so much time with Quackity it had become easier to avoid his outbursts. The man was volatile, in every single way.

“Did you hear what I said?” A slap to his face. “Answer me and stop wasting my time, you filthy mutt.”

Dream swallowed, his throat felt thick and dry from the lack of water. “The... The knife.”

“I didn't hear you. You need to speak louder.” A scornful smile spread across Quackity's lips.

“I- I want you to use the knife, Sir.”

“There you go, puppy,” Quackity purred, letting go of his hair before stroking through it, untangling a few strands. Dream closed his eyes, leaning into the hand a second time.

His blood ran like rivers over the crying obsidian. Dream didn't know humans were even capable of bleeding so much. If he squinted, it looked almost beautiful, the way the crimson spread out across the floor, creating its own piece of art.

He didn't startle up from his sleeping position on the floor, gasping for air; he never did.

Instead, he dazedly blinked up at the ceiling, chest heaving and still out of breath but oddly calm at the same time. There was something horrifyingly familiar about waking up this way. He had been screaming again, he could tell by the way his throat itched uncomfortably and he fell into a coughing fit when he tried to clear his throat.

For a split second, he expected Techno to come rushing into his room, ready to comfort him and bring him down from the head space he often fell into right after waking up from a nightmare. Most of the time he would go non verbal for the rest of the day if it was a bad one and Techno would stay with him, being way more patient with him than Dream ever deserved.

But the door stayed closed and no one came in to check on him.

There was a dull pain in his chest, barely there but at the same time it was, heavy and burning and making him want to never leave the comfort of his bed ever again. He was hurting and he felt like he was on the verge of crying, but the tears wouldn't come out and it made him frustrated and angry and it only fueled the pain in his chest even more. He felt like he was suffocating on his own grief over a past that had long been left behind by everyone else but him.

All he wanted was to be back in Techno's cabin, burying his head in the soft fur of Steve, feeling the soothing heat of the fireplace and listening to the raging snow storm in front of their door. He wanted it so bad but at the same time that desire made him feel childish, stupid. At the end of the day, he'd been the one who choose to leave the comfort of the Antarctic.

He didn't regret leaving, in a way. He should't have grown so attached to his rival and his home and he'd overstayed his hospitality, had guilt tripped Techno into thinking that he owned him more than he actually did, leading him to take care of Dream despite him being such a burdened. Leaving had been the right choice but that didn't mean he didn't miss Steve or his room in the attic or staying up late into the night to watch the aurora borealis wander over the black sky.

And maybe, just maybe, he missed Techno, too.

For an indeterminate span of time, he just lay on the wooden floorboards, trying to ground himself in the present before finally being able to drag himself up.

He took a shower, trying to rinse off the remains of the nightmare but it stayed, a slight, unsettling buzzing deep in his bones.

Stepping outside for the first time in over a week felt weird but Dream couldn't decide if it was a good or bad kind of weird.

He had put on a thin, bright pink sweater and a gray pair of sweat pants. Karl's taste in fashion was so much different than his, much more colorful and vivid and as much as he appreciated Karl for letting him burrow his clothes, he did wish he had his green hoodie and black cargo pants back. Besides, it was only one more thing adding to the mountains of guilt for owing Karl something.

It was a sunny day, meadows warmed up from the sunshine, the flowers and blades of the grass slowly moving with the soft breeze coming from east.

It was the first time that Dream actually got to appreciate the architecture of Kinoko Kingdom. Tall buildings reached up to the sky like the flowers growing from the ground, overgrown and intertwined with earthy brown and dotted red mushrooms. It was a beautiful nation, half ruled by mortals, half taken back by raw nature.

He didn't have any specific destination so he strolled around the Kingdom for a while, admiring the buildings and structures from close up and dipping a foot into the cool water of the pond in the center.

It was peaceful here, mellow and easeful and for a moment it felt like a place he could actually stay at. But it was nothing more than wishful thinking and Dream knew that. He was already a big burden for Karl, Sapnap and George – wanting to stay here was selfish.

The sun was already on its way down to the horizon when Dream decided to go visit the forest next to the prideful Kingdom.

Here in the woods it was teeming with all sorts of mushrooms, small ones not bigger than the palm of his hand, others as tall as the trees sprouting from the fresh soil of the forest floor. A creek lazily cut through the quiet landscape and birds were creating a chaotic symphony in the branches above his head.

He lowered himself onto the ground, hands sinking into the soft moss bed beneath him. He took a deep breath, inhaling the crispy air.

“You aren’t planing on leaving us already, are you?”

Gone was the peaceful atmosphere as Dream whipped around, adrenaline surging through his veins, screaming at him to *run away*.

But when he turned around he wasn’t met with a scarred face and the sharp blade of an axe but instead found one brown and one blue eye staring at him, calculated and unreadable.

George, Dream noticed, hadn’t changed at all. There were a few leaves and mushrooms woven into his hair and his chin was shadowed with stubbles but otherwise not a single thing had changed since the last time he saw him – and gods, it had been a long time. Before Kinoko Kingdom, before the prison. It felt like a life time ago.

But here he was – George, the boy who used to be so easy to love. He had made George hate him, had sacrificed his own happiness for George to be protected. And seeing him here, between knee tall mushrooms, illuminated by soft rays of the sun, he knew he made the right decision. He would do it all again, a million times over, if it meant for George to be safe.

“I saw you go outside earlier and for a second I really thought you were planning on leaving.”

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, then.”

George let out a sigh, kneeling down so he was face to face with the person he once called a best friend – or maybe, even more. “Look, Dream. You want to know what I think about you? About this whole situation? I honestly don’t know what to think. I’m angry and still hurt and you showing up here made everything so much more difficult. But I don’t hate you.” His stoic expression changed into something softer. “I don’t think I could ever hate you.”

“You should.”

“I know,” George sighed again, gaze fixating on a small, white mushroom to his left. “It would make things so much easier. But I’m just too tired to hate someone nowadays, I suppose.”

The wind around them grew stronger, picking up one of the leaves in George’s hair and taking it away, deep into the forest.

“Karl said you aren’t the same person you used to be, that something happened to you in prison that you didn’t want to talk about.”

“Nothing happened. What Sappan said was true, Karl is just naive.” It was so much easier to make George hate him, to be the villain everyone expected him to be.

George’s tilted his head to the side, raising an eyebrow. “You had a nightmare last night,” he stated matter-of-factly.

Dream’s eyes widened. “What?”

“I could hear you scream,” George explained. “And it wasn’t the first time that happened this week. So no, I don’t think Karl is naive when he says that something happened to you. You used to have nightmares a lot when we were younger but never this bad. I’m not stupid, Dream.”

Dream clenched his jaw, looking away.

“There is something you aren’t telling us and I think the reason you are so afraid of telling us is because you know that whatever it is, it would make us hate you less.”

Dream opened his mouth to say something but not a single word lay on his tongue. He could only watch as George stood up, giving him one last glance.

“You are here now, Dream. You aren’t alone anymore.”

Then why did it feel like he still was.

George was gone and Dream was still sitting on the forest floor where the older man had left him behind. His mind was racing and it didn’t want to slow down. His emotions were a cocktail of confusion and fear and uncertainty and he felt poisoned by it.

“You aren’t alone anymore.”

George had heard him have a nightmare and he hadn’t checked up on him, Karl tried his best but at the end of the day he would always comfort his fiancé and friend first and Sappnap couldn’t be in a room with him without ending up screaming at him.

George was wrong. Dream didn’t have anyone anymore. And as much as that hurt it was good. He *choose* to be alone, choose to hurt his best friends in order to protect them. He had made his decision and he didn’t regret it, not if it meant for his friends to be here, alive, breathing. He would go back to prison without a second thought, would walk into Quackity’s open blade. Everything for his friends.

The world loved to paint him as a villain and if that was what everyone wanted, he would give it to them. But he was not a monster. At least he used to think that. It was the only thing keeping him from losing himself to the prison, to Quackity and the torture and pain. Still, he could see the way Sappnap looked at him, knew what the other was thinking.

The promise.

Sappnap used to remind him of the setting sun, soft shades of orange and red. Now, when he looked at him, he saw nothing but a raging fire, waiting to burn him whole. He was waiting for him to mess up, to make a mistake. Dream was sure Sappnap was sleeping with a knife ready under his pillow at night.

It was getting colder when Dream got up from the ground, making his way out of the forest and back to his (*not yours*) house in Kinoko Kingdom.

He brushed his hair out of his face. It had grown out again, having been cut short after his prison escape, hair too filthy and matted for Techno to be able to safe it. But in the past few months it had grown back stronger and healthier than it had been in a while, dirty blond hair falling down to his shoulders.

Reaching the house he’d been staying in for the last couple of days, he stopped for moment, letting his gaze wander over the beauty of the Kingdom. A single crow let go of the roof of one of the nearby buildings and with one strong flap of its wings it was gone. The sun had moved down more, ready to set, making the sky flame up, as if someone had spilled red ink over the horizon.

Maybe it wouldn't be all bad, staying here for a while.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Karl manages to convince Dream to go outside and visit a village with him. It does not end well. But this time, Dream isn't alone. And he makes a new friend along the way.

TW: Blood, torture, panic attack, flashback, brief mentioning of animal death

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Today was the day Karl would take Dream shopping.

And no, Dream did not have a choice.

He dragged him out of the house when it was still cold outside and the sun was barely over the hilltop. Dew covered the burned down grass, scorched yellow from wistful summer days.

There was a village a few chunks away, half covered by the shadows of a dark forest. Sometimes, Sappap, him and George would visit the village by twilight to join the night festivities. He hoped that some day Dream could come with them to see the beauty of the water lanterns by the lake that bordered the sea, and the way music and laughter and colors seemed to blend together into a swirl of euphoria and bliss.

One day, he promised himself, he would take Dream with them.

Dream was oddly quiet today. No matter how many questions Karl asked to get the other man involved into a conversation, Dream continued to be silent. It was like he'd gone completely non-verbal, and Karl was pretty certain that it had to do with the screaming that had woken him up the other night. Karl wanted nothing more than to comfort Dream, but the man was like the prison he'd escaped from: locked off and seemingly unyielding. Karl had yet to find away inside. He didn't want to pressure him into doing or saying something he wasn't ready for but seeing him like this tore him apart.

So Karl stopped questioning him, coming up with his own stories to fill the silence that didn't require any participation. He talked about that one time George had fallen into water while trying to fish, and about the day Sappap had been chased around Kinoko Kingdom by a pig (which led to Sappap banning every single pig from the Kingdom).

The entire time, Dream was all tense, his jaw clenched and shoulders drawn up. However, Karl caught a sliver of a smile here and there, the corners of his lips barely turning up, but it was all Karl needed to smoothly carry on the one sided conversation, making sure to let Dream know that he didn't need to say anything in return.

It worked fine, Karl retelling stories about their friends and Kinoko Kingdom while Dream stuck like a shadow to his side, silently listening to the stories and tales of a time in his friends lives that he hadn't been able to be a part of.

It worked, but that didn't stop the concern from growing in Karl's chest. He just hoped Dream wouldn't regret coming with him.

By the time they reached the village, Dream was hot on his heels, almost frantic, afraid to lose sight of Karl. At one point he even grabbed the hem of Karl's hoodie like a little child, scared to get lost in the crowds of people pushing past them. It simultaneously warmed Karl's heart and split it in half. This wasn't the same Dream who had welcomed him to his server all those suns ago. The Dream he'd come to know was always prideful and powerful, moving with his chest out, confident and agile.

Now, his look was cast to the ground, hiding from the villagers' prying eyes behind Karl's back. He was shy, anxious and nervous, flinching away from any loud noises or sudden movements. He looked like an abused puppy and Karl felt helpless. He didn't know how to help Dream, couldn't know – not if Dream didn't want to tell him what was wrong.

They went to grab Dream some new clothes first. The store was right at the entrance of the village. A small but cozy hut, filled with velvet and cotton and wool and everything carefully hand-sewn and put together. The owner was an old lady, hair whitened from time eating away on it, and eyesight getting worse and worse with each year. She had the warmest smile and the biggest heart, always being delighted when Karl came to visit her.

"Karl, it's been a while," she greeted him, drawing him into a tight hug. "What brings you here this time?"

"My friend needs new clothes. We just wanted to look around for now. If we need anything we know where to find you," Karl said, taking Dream's hand into his to calm the rapid fidgeting. Dream shuffled around, obviously nervous and uncomfortable. Feeling Karl's fingers wrap around his hand seemed to calm him down, if only a little, and he squeezed Karl's hand. Karl smiled, squeezing back.

They went through the rows of shelves, taking their time to look over every piece of cloth the store had to offer. Dream was hesitant at first, no matter how many times Karl's assured him that it was fine, that he could take whatever he wanted. Karl had probably enough money with him to buy the whole village.

After ten minutes of mindlessly wandering around with no results, Karl decided to grab everything Dream's eyes stayed on for more than a few seconds. In the past week, Karl had started picking up on Dream's new mannerisms and body language pretty quickly, figuring out that if Dream needed anything – food, or water or anything else – he would never ask directly, making Karl assume that Sam probably had never been all too fond of Dream demanding or wanting things in prison.

At the end of their little shopping spree, they ended up with a bunch of different kinds of clothes. Karl was satisfied with the end result, storing everything away in his inventory. He made sure that Dream didn't have to carry anything, and chuckled a little at Dream's pout.

"I gotta get a few more things. You don't have to come with me. Just wait for me here and I'll be back soon." They were standing in the middle of the town's square, Dream leaning against a little fountain while Karl was surveying the nearby stores, thinking about where he should go first.

Dream opened his mouth in what seemed like a silent protest. He locked eyes with Karl for the first time this day, shaking his head frantically, and shifting around in his spot. Even non-verbal it was clear what he was trying to say, but Karl put his hand on Dream's shoulder in what he hoped was a

grounding gesture. "I'll be back in no time, I promise. Just wait right here by the fountain, alright?"

Dream still didn't seem convinced, but followed his orders anyway and stayed put. Karl felt a bit guilty for forcing the blonde to do something that made his discomfort grow, but he was planning to surprise Dream with something and needed him to stay here for a while.

It truly was a great day. The sky was clear, the sun was shining brightly and bees and butterflies were ruling the air while the villager kids owned the earth, chasing each other around the buildings. Karl loved the village because it was always so cheerful, so full of life.

He tried to hurry up, not wanting to keep Dream waiting for too long. He bought a couple of groceries, getting George a new bow (he had broken his while climbing a tree for a stupid bet a couple of days ago) and Sapnap a new knife for better hunting.

It had taken him less than 10 minutes to collect all of the things and he hoped Dream was still doing alright. He'd be back in only a few more minutes but before that he needed to do one more thing.

He hoped Dream would forgive him for leaving him alone for a while when he saw Karl's gift.

Dream hated Karl.

Well, not really. He didn't actually *hate* him (he could never), but right now he was sitting on the edge of a little fountain, getting more and more anxious with each second that passed. And Karl still wasn't back.

The day had started horribly, the nightmare still faintly buzzing in his bones, and he would lie if he said that he didn't enjoy the little trip Karl had forced him onto. It was a nice, little distraction and the sun on his skin felt great, but there were a lot of people in the village, especially children who were crying and screaming and it made him nervous and jumpy.

His leg was bouncing up and down and he was absently scratching his arms. He was hyper aware of every single noise around him, turning around every few seconds to look behind him even though no one was there.

He hated this. He felt so exposed, so vulnerable. He was probably just imagining things but he swore he could feel the eyes of over single villager on him. He wanted Karl back. Him being here earlier had been oddly comforting, as if he was a shield, protecting Dream from the world around them.

Dream pulled his shoulders up. Despite being over 6'2'', he felt so small. Like he was a little kid stuck in the body of an adult. It was silly, ridiculous, that one of the best and most powerful fighters on the whole SMP had been reduced to nothing but a scared, helpless puppy, following Karl around and not being able to function with him gone.

Something soft on the back of his leg made him jump up and almost fall into the water of the fountain behind him. His eyes flew wide open as he stared down at whatever had managed to startle him so much.

It was a brown tabby cat with a big white spot on their chest. They were looking up at him with big, green eyes as if they were expecting Dream to do something. He just stared back.

After a while the cat seemed to get impatient. Tilting their little head, they looked almost annoyed at Dream for not understanding them before they meowed and jumped up on the brim next to him, sniffing at his clothes. Carefully, as if the cat was afraid they would startle Dream again, they lifted their paw and tapped on his hand that was still scratching his arm. Another meow.

Confused and surprised, Dream stopped the movement which earned him another meow, this one almost sounding pleased. He opened his mouth, then he closed it again, leaning back and observing the cat's next step. The feline seemed to be determent to befriend the new stranger in their village. Without an invitation, they hopped onto Dream's lap and started making it their home.

However, they didn't seem completely satisfied yet. Nudging Dream's hand again in a silent demand to start patting them, they meowed a fourth time. With a mixture of amusement and uncertainty, Dream complied. Their fur was soft like silk and his fingers quickly found a rhythm, vibrating with the purr coming from the cat's chest.

The faintest ghost of a smile appeared on his lips and he closed his eyes. He didn't even notice how the noises of the busy village slowly faded into the background and his leg had stopped bouncing.

He sat there for a while, almost relaxed, the sun warming his body, and the cat in his lap purring. Dream found himself humming in contentment while he kept on patting them.

"I see you found a friend."

Dream's eyes fluttered back open to see Karl peer down at him with the biggest grin he'd ever seen on him. He had one hand held behind his back, obstructing Dream's view on whatever he was holding, his other hand putting down a bag filled with his errands. He got down on his knees to get a better look at the cat who was on their back, snowy belly showing up at Dream in a silent gesture of trust.

"What an angel," Karl cooed as he started stroking their ear. "I'm glad to know you weren't completely alone. Hope you weren't too stressed out by the way. I tried to hurry, but it still took a while."

Dream just shrugged his shoulders. He wasn't mad at Karl anymore for leaving him alone for a while. Although he didn't particularly enjoy it, he, at least, hadn't been able to get in Karl's way while he got the things he needed.

"Oh before I forget it. I got you something. Look!" Karl said, excitedly, pulling his hand out from behind his back to show Dream what he'd been hiding.

There was a ribbon on the palm of his hand, made out of a black and a dark green string woven into each other. A sapphire and jade stone had been tied to the end, the two shades of green mixing with the colors of the ribbon. It was gorgeous and Dream was afraid to touch it, to blemish such beauty with his tainted fingers.

With wide eyes, he looked at Karl, waiting for permission.

"It's for you dummy," Karl laughed. "I saw you struggling with your hair earlier and thought you might appreciate something to tie it up, get it out of your face."

Dream continued to stare at him, not making any moves to take the ribbon out of his still outstretched hand.

Karl couldn't be serious. The ribbon looked expensive, way more than he would ever be worth (*Not that I'm worth anything*, he thought bitterly). Why would Karl buy something so precious just for him?

"Wait, let me- can I?" Karl asked, carefully, pointing to Dream's hair. After letting a few seconds pass by, Dream nodded hesitantly. He was still not sure how to deal with this situation, too overwhelmed to do anything but sit there and wait for Karl's next move.

Karl beamed at him, getting up so he could reach his hair better. Slander fingers quickly got to work, threading through messy strands, combing through it and getting any knots out. The fingertips brushing across his scalp felt heavenly and without meaning to, Dream's eyes slipped close again and the tension in his shoulders fled away a tad. He could feel the cat still purring in his lap, bringing his body further into a state of relaxation.

After what felt like forever and not enough time, Karl stopped.

"I'm finished."

Dream opened his eyes again and let Karl guide him around so he could see his silhouette in the reflection of the fountain's water.

"Do you like it?"

Oh. Yes, he liked it.

Karl had put his hair in a beautiful braid, tied together with the black, green ribbon that made his hair look so much more vibrant. The hairstyle reminded him of the way Techno used to often put his hair in once it had grown back out enough, decorating it with golds and reds; a Piglin tradition he'd been more than happy to share with Dream.

"Thank you," Dream whispered, eyes trailing over the strands woven into each other and the ribbon. He could see Karl's smile widen even more behind him in the reflection. But it fell into a frown when he glanced at something at Dream's side.

"Oh, did you cut yourself on something?"

Raising an eyebrow, Dream looked down to one of his hands supporting his body on the ledge of the fountain. The rock underneath him was painted red. His eyes widened, pulling his hand away which only made the blood run down his palm faster.

He must've cut himself on one of the protruding stones on the side of the fountain, he thought, distantly, eyes still fixated on the crimson blood. It coated the surface beneath him, staining everything red.

"Please don't," he whimpered, the words coming out before he could even think. He winced with his next breath as he realized what he'd done. Sir hated it when he talked back, or at all that is; only when he asked him questions. He swallowed down an apology, knowing it would make things even worse.

He didn't remember how long Quackity had been torturing him for. His mind was fuzzy and his head felt heavy. He could feel the heat of the lava on his skin, the obsidian under his palms. It felt cooler than usual, or maybe he just imagined things.

Beside him, the clattering of iron against iron could be heard and he bit his lip until the blood not only covered the palm of his hand but filled his tongue as well. His nose and mouth stung with the thick smell and taste of copper, mixing with sweat and the salt of tears. When had he started crying?

“I told you not to say something without permission, didn’t I? When do you learn, mutt.”

The blade of a knife cut into his skin. It was the one with teeth that loved to tear into him, rip his flesh apart. Quackity liked this one, used it often. Dream was sure it was his favorite, followed by the shock collar that made Dream’s body ‘convulse so prettily.’

“Apologize.”

Dream didn’t hesitate, didn’t stop the words from tearing their way out of his throat, followed by sob after sob. “I’m sorry, Sir. I’m so sorry. I’ll make sure it’ll never happen again, I promise. Sir, please!” He was pleading, begging and he didn’t care because the hand on his shoulder burned more than the knife, the lava, every single torture device, ever could.

“Dream?”

He screamed, trashing around, mind too far gone to register soft fur next to his leg.

“Please, don’t! I’m sorry, I’m sorry-” he was mumbling now. Sir hated when he mumbled, but he had already broken two rules, had talked and moved without permission. There was no way out of punishment, so he didn’t do anything to stop the tears and sobs and flinches every time he felt a body too close next to his.

“Can you hear me, Dream?”

He curled up into himself, legs pulled to his chest and face hidden behind his hands. Since when could he move his arms so freely? Pulling his hands back a bit, he stared at his wrists through blurry vision, blinking away the tears to clear his confusion together with his vision. There were no cuffs leaving dark bruises like bracelets on his skin. Quackity always had him wear cuffs so he didn’t move around so much. Why weren’t they there? Something wasn’t right...

“Dream, hey, I need you to look at me. Can you do that for me?”

Of course he could. He would do anything Sir told him to do, he had to. If he didn’t, he’d get pain and blood and bruises and *agony*.

“There you go,” the person in front of him said, sounding relived. “Okay, can you tell me five things you see?”

Confused but complying like he was supposed to, he looked around, trying to get his vision to focus on anything.

“The obsidian,” he started, squinting at his surroundings. He could hear the person next to him move, gasping at something. “Er, the piece of wood there, the buildings-” *buildings?* “The streetlamp and the flower.” *Streetlamp and flower? What?*

“Good job, and now four things you can feel.”

“The clothes on my skin, the blood on my hand, grass underneath me and...” he trailed off, breathing growing steadier as the task grounded him and gave him a distraction. He felt lightheaded and still so confused, disorientated but his vision slowly but surely shifted back into focus. “Soft fur.”

“Three things you hear.”

“Your voice,” *Karl’s* voice, “The wind in the leaves and birds chirping.”

“Two things you can smell.”

“Freshly cut grass and you.” Karl always smelled of summer and flowers and the sun.

“One thing you can taste.”

“Blood. Just blood.”

“You bit your lip, it’s okay.” Sluggishly, Dream blinked, looking down at the cat curled up on the grass, cuddling his leg, then up at Karl who was looking at him with so much relief and warmth.

“You back with me?”

Dream nodded, taking in more of his surroundings. He was no longer sitting on the ledge of the fountain but on the ground at the entrance of the village, the backside of a house protecting him from anyone who might look their way.

“You started having a panic attack, so I led you out of the village to a more quiet place,” Karl explained, giggling when the cat nudged Dream, impatiently signaling him to start patting them again. “They just followed us, didn’t want to leave you alone.”

Dream reached out a hand to pet them which earned him a loud purr. He couldn't hold back the small smile that pulled on his lips and he saw Karl grin from the corner of his vision. “I don’t think they’ll ever leave your side again, judging by how they clung onto you earlier. Looks like you have a new pet now.”

A somber feeling in his chest chased away the smile on Dream’s faced. Having a cat sounded nice but he didn’t think he could keep her. The last time he was in the same room with a cat, it died because of him. He couldn’t take them home, not when the memories of the lifeless body of Hope still hurt like a fresh wound across his heart.

They stayed on the ground for some time, Dream continuing petting the feline while still calming down from his flashback and panic attack. After a while, Dream leaned his head onto Karl’s shoulder, exhaustion crashing into his body. Karl didn’t ask him what happened and Dream was forever grateful for that. He couldn’t tell him even if he wanted to. Quackity was Karl and Sapnap’s fiancé. It wasn’t fair of Dream to make them choose between their lover and him.

When the sun was crawling back down the sky, Karl helped Dream stand up and stumble back to Kinoko Kingdom. He was beyond tired, the breakdown having drained all his energy. For once, he longed for sleep, mind and body too tired to care about the nightmares that were awaiting him like the monsters under his bed.

The cat followed them the entire way home.

Chapter End Notes

Could it be?? Dream gets comfort????

Honestly, my man deserves it after everything I put him through the past three chapters haha.

So yeah, I'm still not 100% satisfied with this chapter but I just can't figure out what's bothering me so this will have to do i guess.

Also, holy shit! Over 300 Kudos and 2600 hits? That's insane. And thank you for all the nice comments. They make my day :D

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

A very tense dinner takes place and Dream ends up having another breakdown

TW: signs and mentions of torture and manipulation

Chapter Notes

I decided I'd spoil you guys and already upload the next chapter today instead of tomorrow. Enjoy! :D

Btw, I am writing a chapter with a lot of hurt/comfort (both physically and mentally) and I thought I'd let you guys choose from which perspective I'm going to write it. The chapter before that was from Sapnap's POV so let me know if I should continue writing from his perspective or if I should switch to either George or Karl. (it's like chapter 13 tho, so you won't see it for a while, just to let you guys know)

A few months ago, George used to have his own little cottage down at the forest line and Karl used to fall asleep in the big library by the center of Kinoko more often than in his actual bed. Over time they had sought comfort in each other and in the closeness of company to the point where neither of them could handle being alone for too long. They had all moved into the same house after a while, quickly finding a rhythm that worked for everyone. They had all different ways to cope with whatever their life had become, George being more asleep and than awake, Sapnap being out hunting most of the time and Karl staying home, losing himself in endless shelves filled to the brim with old books and manuscripts.

Their dynamic had shifted when Dream had started staying in their Kingdom, a place that was supposed to be too far away for their past to catch up.

Karl had made it into his mission to find out whatever happened to Dream in the prison, spending a lot of time with the admin. One day he'd even managed to get Dream out of the house and down to the village a few chunks over. Sapnap didn't know what had happened that day but when they'd come home that evening, Dream had looked beyond exhausted and they'd brought a friend along.

Her name was Patches, as Sapnap later found out through Karl, and would not leave Dream's side under any circumstances. She was like his personal bodyguard, always either prowling around his legs or sitting on his shoulder. If Sapnap didn't still despise Dream he would almost find it cute, the way the two would often sit on the front steps of the house and look over Kinoko Kingdom.

In general, Dream left his room a lot more often lately. Most of the time just following Karl around like a lost puppy. Sapnap hadn't seen his fiancé that happy in quite some time.

"I think I'm slowly getting through to him," Karl had said a few days ago. And Sapnap had smiled because despite not caring about Dream, he did care about Karl. And when he was happy, Sapnap

was as well.

George, Sapnap had noticed, had started sleeping less ever since Dream's arrival. One evening, when insomnia had eaten away at both their abilities to go to bed, George had told him it was because the dreams had stopped that day.

It had been a good thing, for both George and Sapnap. They started doing more together again, almost like in the old days. They would go out to train or hunt or just wander around the area with no specific plans in mind. Sometimes, Sapnap tried to convince himself that they were still in the past, before the wars, the terror, the bloodshed. And for a moment it would work. But then he would notice the empty spot between him and George and he was pulled back into the present.

The air was crisp today and Sapnap could already see the wall of dark clouds further down the sky announcing the upcoming storm. The branch of the tree he was sitting in swayed back and forth as the wind picked up.

"George," he called out to his friend. "It's going to rain soon. We should head back."

He let go of the tree, skillfully jumping down to the leaf covered forest floor. Their hunt had been successful. Five rabbits and a deer. It would last for the next week in case the storm decided to stay for a while.

Next to him, George emerged, bow and arrows already stored away on his back. He looked a bit disheveled, his beloved goggles crookedly sitting in the mess that was his hair and dirt smeared across his cheek but his lips were cracked into a big grin. "Did you see my shot earlier? The arrow hit the poor bunny right into its eye."

"That was sick, dude," Sapnap laughed. "We have so much food now. Karl's gonna be really happy. The nimrod was worried that we would run out of food soon."

"Speaking of, we should probably hurry up. Don't want Karl to be angry at us again because we are too late for dinner. He can be scary when he's upset," George said, already starting to move into the direction of their Kingdom.

"Maybe it's just because he's taller than you."

"He's taller than you, too! *I'm* literally taller than you, too."

"Only like one inch, that doesn't count."

"Oh, you bet it does."

They easily fell into the familiarity of bantering as they made their way back to Kinoko. The storm clouds came closer and closer and in the end they had to run to avoid the rain. A murder of crows sat on the roof of their house and rose up into the air when they arrived. For a moment, Sapnap watched the black birds fly away before George pulled him into the warmth of their home.

Stepping into the kitchen, the smell of fresh baked bread and delicious rabbit stew greeted them and Sapnap was about to sit down at the table when he noticed the person already sitting on one of the chairs.

"What is he doing," Sapnap flipped around to where Karl was filling water into a glass jug, ignoring the way Dream flinched behind him.

“He’s going to eat with us today.” Karl didn’t even look up as he spoke. “And you two will behave. Sit down, dinner’s ready.” Sapnap raised an eyebrow, ready to complain but the sharp look from Karl was enough to put him in his place. He didn’t leave any room for arguing, taking the jug and bringing it over to the table which was already set.

George and Sapnap traded a few uncertain glances before sitting down on the chairs furthest away from Dream, who had curled up in himself, shoulder drawn up and eyes fixated onto his hands in his lap. He didn’t seem happy with being here either which meant it had been Karl’s idea. Of course.

To Dream’s feet, his cat had curled herself around his leg, throwing a hostile glance in Sapnap’s direction. Hastily, Sapnap averted his eyes, a shudder running up his spine.

They started eating and Sapnap tried his best to distract himself but he couldn’t stop himself from staring at the man on the opposite side of the table.

The eye bags underneath Dream’s eyes were a stark contrast to his pale skin. He didn’t get enough sleep if the screams at night were anything to go by. Almost every night, Sapnap would wake up to Dream’s incoherent yelling and Karl sitting upright in bed next to him, looking at him with a worried expression. Sapnap would lie if he said he didn’t feel slightly concerned as well. He might hate Dream, but he wasn’t heartless.

The problem was that Sapnap couldn’t tell if it was all an act anymore. He had been so sure at first but the more time passed and the more days Dream spent with them, Sapnap started to feel doubt infest his conscience. It didn’t help that George was on Karl’s side, believing that Dream wasn’t the menace Sapnap saw in him anymore.

And now sitting here in front of him, the doubt continued to spread.

“Sapnap, can you pass me some carrots?” George asked, slicing through the thoughts in his head.

“No.”

“You’re the worst.”

“That’s not what your mom said last night.”

George rolled his eyes. “Oh yeah? What did she say?”

“That, uh, that I have a big penis.”

“Sapnap!”

“I mean, he isn’t lying...”

“KARL!”

A familiar and yet so foreign wheeze made all of them stop in their tracks and turn around, looking at Dream in surprise. The admin had one hand in front of his mouth as if he was trying to take back his laughter. He looked embarrassed, mortified. Sapnap locked eyes with George and smirked.

Dream had always been the balance to Sapnap and George’s antitheses and Sapnap believed that was the reason why their friendship had always been so easy. Dream always used to be the wind, encouraging and fueling their chaos but also being able to push away a storm if it stayed for too long, bringing peace and calmness over Sapnap and George’s constant fighting.

And it had been noticeable, Dream having not only left a gaping chasm in their life when he'd abandoned them but also having left a minefield behind, ready to detonate at any given moment. And it had exploded, so many times. For the first two weeks after Dream had left them, there had been rarely a time where Sapnap and George hadn't been fighting about some small, unimportant thing. Most of the time they would forget the reason of their conflict in the middle of arguing.

It had been bad without Dream stepping between them. And then George had started sleeping more and they had seen each other less and less and with their conversations, their fights had died out as well.

Although Sapnap would never admit it out loud, he was glad that they started talking more again, even if it took Dream coming back for it to happen. It was kind of ironic in a way. It just showed how important Dream was in carrying the foundation of their friendship.

They continued eating and Sapnap was glad for the distraction it provided him, stuffing his mouth full with mountains of food. Hunting had taken away a lot of his energy and left him aching with hunger.

"Dream?"

Sapnap glanced up to see Karl looking at Dream with furrowed eyebrows, who was still huddled in his seat, not making any move to eat. His hands were folded in his lap, eyes staring at the food in front of him with a mix of hunger and remorse.

"Dream, why aren't you eating? Are you not hungry?"

Dream mumbled something under his breath, nervously shifting around in his chair.

"What?"

"Need to wait for permission." His voice was barely above a whisper and Sapnap almost didn't hear it, like he was afraid to speak out loud. Karl threw an alarmed glance in Sapnap and George's direction.

"Dream, what are you talking about?" It was George this time who asked the question. The brunette's expression was unreadable but Sapnap saw his fingers twitch, a desperate attempt to do his best to compose himself.

"I'm not allowed to eat without permission, Sir." The moment the last word had passed Dream's mouth, his eyes widened with regret and fear.

"Dream," Karl said, obviously trying to keep his voice as calm as possible but failing to push back the shakiness. "What happened to you in prison?"

Dream just shook his head stubbornly, lips pressed together. Patches, who had fallen asleep at his feet, woke up and pressed her small body further into his legs.

"Something obviously happened. Please tell us. We won't be mad, I promise," Karl pleaded desperately, eyes searching Sapnap's for silent help and support. But for once, Sapnap did not know what to do. Dream's words had unleashed something deep in him, had shaking him in his very core in a way he didn't know was possible. It was a weave of cold terror and hot confusion that crashed onto him, leaving him frozen in place.

I'm not allowed to eat without permission, Sir. What the fuck.

“I didn’t say anything. Just forget it, I’m sorry,” Dream rushed, body tensing up as if he was preparing for something.

“We just want to help you.”

Dream bristled, “Don’t. Nothing happened. I don’t need help.”

“You said you weren’t allowed to eat without permission, Dream. That’s not normal,” George butted in. “Did they…” His breath hitched. “Were there times where they refused you food in prison?”

“Why does that matter.” Dream was going into defense, Sapnap could tell, fighting water with fire, afraid to drown. Sapnap knew because that was how he liked to act. It was a coping mechanism, not a healthy one anyway. Get them to be angry at you because you can’t deal with their concern.

Sapnap didn’t say anything, couldn’t. His throat felt like it was closing up and he couldn’t bring a single word out even if he wanted to.

“For how long did they starve you?” Karl asked breathless, afraid for the answer.

“They didn’t starve me.” Restlessly shifting around in his chair, Dream’s eyes darted around the room, as if he was looking for ways to escape the uncomfortable situation. “It was my fault. I didn’t know how to behave. They just had to teach me a few lessons sometimes. It’s fine.”

“Fine?” Karl almost yelled, cringing when he saw Dream flinch away. “Sorry. But that is not okay, Dream. They shouldn’t starve you. That’s literally torture.”

At that, Dream let out a chuckle, dry and humorless.

“Listen, Dream-”

“No, Karl. Stop. Stop, asking me all these questions, stop acting like you care. What happened in prison was my fault. Just let it be. I don’t need your fake pity.” With that, Dream jumped out of his seat, dashing out of the room, Patches hot on his heels.

Karl, still in shock about what just happened got up as well but was stopped by George’s hand on his shoulder. “I will go check up on him. Make sure you’re doing alright first, okay?”

“I’m fine,” Karl started to weakly protest but his hands were shaking and his legs buckled underneath him the moment he took a step forward. Resigning, Karl sat down again, earning a relieved sigh from George who made his way out of the kitchen.

Sapnap was still silent.

He tried. He tried so hard to latch onto the belief that Dream was putting on nothing but an act to play with them, to hurt them again like he did once before.

But Dream had never been a good actor and Sapnap knew that.

Slowly, the realization hit him, that all this time he’d been clinging onto an illusion because it had been easier than to admit the truth.

He wasn’t blind. He saw the exhaustion etched into Dream’s face like the scars running down his battered skin. Dream looked different, *wrong*. Like he was ready to let the world keep on spinning without him, to let everyone move on while he stayed behind. And Sapnap couldn’t ignore it any longer, couldn’t pretend that he was blind to all these things anymore. In this moment, Sapnap

realized that Karl was right. This wasn't the same Dream who had been the biggest threat to the entire SMP all those months ago (Gods, almost an entire year had passed since). Something had changed and he wasn't the same anymore. Sapnap just wasn't sure he was ready for what that meant for him, for George, for all of them.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

It's like a boiling pot and one day, inevitably, it will overflow. And there is nothing you can do.

TW: mention of abuse, self-destructive thoughts

Chapter Notes

I used to write a lot a couple of years ago but then I lost more and more energy and motivation and it's been so long since I was able to finish any of my stories. But reading through all the comments and seeing how many people are interested in my story really gives me the motivation to continue. I really can't tell you guys how much I appreciate it, thank you!

Anygay, next chapter! George and Dream talk, finally.

Dream remembered being a child, the shadows of his past still looming over his head and plaguing his dreams. He remembered Bad being there, trying his best to give him comfort and the feeling of security he desperately needed. Bad hadn't been able to chase away the memories, for they had been too fresh, too deeply carved into his very being. But he'd made it bearable somehow, had calmed down Dream's restless, wounded soul.

Dream remembered Bad promising him to keep him safe and Dream had believed him, had clung to his every word in a way only the foolish nature of a child who was too young to understand the world yet, could believe.

Bad had promised to protect him from the evils of the world but now –sitting in a room that wasn't his (because he had nothing that belonged to him anymore), helplessly trying to get air into his starving lungs, heart beating and stumbling over itself to the point where Dream believed it would give out any second– he thought he'd been naive to believe that Bad would be able to keep his promise.

He just didn't know at what point he became the evil he used to hide away from.

His breaths were shaky and ragged as he tried and failed to compose himself. It had been a mistake to join Karl at dinner. He was so, so, so stupid, should've known better. They probably hated him now. He would, if he was them. It was only a matter of time until they decided he was more trouble than he was worth and send him back to prison. He hoped Karl would let him keep the clothes he got him. It was selfish of him to want that, but they were soft and clean – everything the prison wasn't, and Dream didn't want to let go of the illusion of owning something that was unconditionally and truly his quite yet.

He didn't want to go back to prison, but he didn't want to burden his ex friends any longer, either. The guilt of that knowledge ate through his core like acid with each rising sun and he didn't know

how much longer he could live with a scorched heart.

Biting back a sob, he curled into himself tighter, pushing the heels of his bare feet into the softness of the carpet underneath him. He didn't even notice someone entering the room until they were in front of him, speaking to him, "Dream? It's me, George. You are gonna be okay. Can you hear me?"

"George," he gasped, clutching onto George's arm like he was the air in his lungs, the only reason his heart was still beaten. And he might as well was. George meant safety, he meant comfort. A place to go to when the world was too much, a warm embrace when everything felt too cold. That's what George had always been, always would be.

"Hey, shhh it's fine. You're okay, we are okay. Just focus on breathing." A hand came up to his head, carefully removing the loose ribbon from his hair before combing through it in a soothing motion, smoothing out the messy curls. And for once, he didn't care if agony would come with the hand – he just pushed himself further into the touch. He would take all the pain in the world if it meant only a sliver of the comfort he used to feel around George. He knew he didn't deserve it, but might the prime gods punish him over and over again just so he could allow himself to be selfish now, even if it was only for a split second.

"You are okay, Dream. I got you." The next time a sob ripped his throat apart, he didn't stop it. He hated crying. Crying meant more punishment, more pain and more tears. But hearing George say those words made something snap inside him. And so he let himself cry in front of a person for the first time in a very, very long time. He was falling apart and for once he didn't care.

George just sat there, not stopping him, not hurting him for being loud and needy and weak as he clutched onto him. The hand in his hair was a steady, calming motion, keeping him grounded and his mind from flowing away.

It took the moon to raise up to the dark sky for Dream to stop crying, completely drained out, physically and emotionally. But George was patient and waited by Dream's side the entire time, letting him collapse onto him when his body couldn't hold him up any longer. It felt like back in the days, before the wars and chaos and destruction and that thought alone was almost enough to bring the tears back.

Dream didn't want to breach the silence that had spread across the room, safe for his stuffy, irregular breathing but there was one thing that had been on the tip of his tongue for so long now, waiting to be spoken out loud, to be freed from his conscience so he could finally move on, and he couldn't hold it back any longer. "You didn't come visit me."

"Can you blame me?"

Dream furrowed his brows in concentration, pushing the words around in his mouth, feeling them weighing down onto his tongue, tasting them in the back of his throat. No, he supposed. He really couldn't blame him. It had probably been for the best. He couldn't stand the thought of George ever stepping a foot into the obsidian bowels of hell.

"Did you... did you ever think about visiting?"

"Gods, Dream I-" George breathed out, shaking his head. "I don't think there was a moment I didn't think about it."

They both were quiet again, relishing in the comfortable silence and warmth of the others' presence for a moment, before having to move on to a topic they had been so desperate to avoid ever since

Dream had stepped a foot into Kinoko.

“Dream.”

“Yes?”

“Why did you do the things you did?” When Dream didn’t answer, George hesitantly added, “I’m not angry at you right now. I just want to understand.”

“George, I-” Dream stocked. *Breathe, Dream, remember to breathe*

“I don’t regret what I did to you and Sapnap.” Now it was George’s turn to be quiet. Dream sighed, feeling fatigue weigh at his mind. But he knew he owed George an explanation. And maybe, deep down he owed himself one, too. “I never hated you two, but I knew I wasn’t the most liked person on the server and I knew that people would come after you if I didn’t stop associating with you. It was the hardest decision I’ve ever made, but it worked and it kept you safe and I don’t regret it.”

“All of that, it wasn’t because you didn’t care about us, but because you cared *too* much?” Dream nodded.

“You are an idiot, do you know that?” The words didn’t hold any heat and a tired chuckle escaped Dream, raspy and hoarse.

“What about the other things?”

The smile on Dream’s face fell. “I don’t know what happened. One moment everything was fine and the next-” He stopped himself, biting down on his lip hard to stop the memories from coming back. He couldn’t do it. Not now. “I barely even remember what happened. There are snippets and sometimes when I’m asleep more memories come flowing back. But most of the time it’s no more than fleeting colors and emotions. I don’t even remember when it all went downhill. I just started feeling so angry all the time, angry and so, so sad.”

He was rambling at this point but he didn’t care. He needed to get it all out before it was too much and he drowned. It was something he had kept to himself for so long, clumsily swallowing back words whenever Sam or Quackity demanded him to speak, to *explain*. It was a secret, kept so long, and now Dream couldn’t stop the confession from spilling out of him.

“I was so *sad* and something in me thought that the only way to feel happiness ever again was to bring the server back together, to make everyone one big, happy family again.” It felt good to say it out loud after keeping it locked on his tongue for so long, not daring to tell anyone. It wasn’t because he refused to out of spite but because he simply didn’t know why he had done the things he did, hadn’t dared to tell anyone when the utter confusion had kept him in an iron grip. “When I think back, everything is just a blur. This red haziness clinging to my brain like tar, making it so hard to think.”

“That’s exactly how-” George paused, eyes widen with an emotion Dream couldn’t name. Was it disgust?

“Dream, you know about the egg, right? I know Bad told you about what happened when he visited you in prison once.” Dream nodded hesitantly. “Did you ever come into contact with the egg directly?”

Dream blinked. “What?”

“Please, Dream, just answer.”

"I," he swallowed. "I was one of the first people Bad showed the egg, back when he discovered it in some cave next to the spider spawner. But that was a very long time ago."

He swore George's breathing stopped for a second. "Did the feelings of...anger and sadness start right after Bad showed you the egg, perhaps?"

"Maybe? It was around that time, I think but I don't know. Like I said, everything's just fuzzy and I don't remember much. But what does that-"

"Dream," George breathed out. There was an undertone in his voice that made a cold rush of fear wash over Dream. "What you just described...that is exactly how Bad talked about his experience with being possessed by the egg."

There was a pause before Dream found his voice again, "Stop it."

"No, I'm serious. It's-"

"George," Dream barked. George's mouth snapped shut. "I said stop it. It's nice that you are trying to find excuses for me but you don't have to. I'm evil. I know that, you know that, Sapnap knows that. *Everyone* knows that. Please don't try and sugar coat it somehow. There wasn't any... secondary party controlling me. I can't just say that. It wouldn't be fair to the people I hurt."

"No, Dream you don't understand-"

Cutting him off a second time, Dream sighed. He just wanted to close his eyes and sleep, get a little bit of his energy back before they brought him back to prison. Because that would happen the moment the sun announced the next day, that he was certain of. And he was contend with that decision, he decided. He didn't mean to but apparently he had done it again, gone and manipulated Karl into thinking he deserved a second chance and something akin to love, and made George believe that what he'd done wasn't his fault. He truly was a monster. Quackity had been right. All he did was lie and manipulate.

"Please just let it be. Accept who I am, like Sapnap's already done. Hating me will get easier with time, I promise." It had been so easy for Sapnap. So why couldn't George just hate him, too?

"What are you talking about?" Instead of agreeing with Dream, George seemed to be getting more desperate with each word that left Dream's foul mouth. He was just holding onto false hope. It was painful to watch and Dream preferred harsh words and hard fists above whatever George was doing right now. But the brunette didn't stop, "It's okay, Dream. Whatever happened, we will sort it out. We will figure out what happened to you."

"George," It sounded more like a plea for help than an attempt to silence George and Dream winced.

"God, how didn't we see it coming? We knew something felt off about the way you were acting. If we had just-"

"Stop it, please. I'm the villain, I'm evil. Please Just stop talking." A sob was starting to crawl up again. He was about to spill over for a second time that day but this time he didn't want to go down without a fight. Still, George's voice was quiet, soothing. A promise of comfort and rest.

"I'm so sorry, we didn't realize something was wrong and tried to help." George started rocking back and forth, arms still around Dream who had sunken against his chest, too tired to keep himself upright any longer. The tremors had started up again.

“You are not evil, you are not a monster.”

“No, no please George. I am the villain, I need to be-” Dream pleaded, desperately tightening his grip on George’s sweater. “Otherwise he- what he did to me, it was all...all the pain, everything was...futile. It can’t be all for nothing, George. Please, I need to be the villain. That’s what I’ve always been. The villain, the tyrant, the dictator. Tell me I’m a monster, *tell me.*”

He could see George furrow his brow but whatever question lay on his tongue, he didn’t speak it out loud. He didn’t need to. It hung in the air like a heavy blanket, ready to suffocate Dream, anyway.

‘What happened to you? What did they do to you in prison? Who did this to you, Dream, who?’

But George didn’t say anything, only continued rocking back and forth and started to hum a quiet tune that felt familiar but Dream couldn’t place it to any specific memory.

“Tell me its my fault, George,” Dream cried but he was only met with silence. “I need to hear it, George. Tell me there was a point to all the pain. *Please.*”

“Shh, it’s alright Dream. We will figure it out. You should sleep now, you need rest.”

That made Dream sob even louder, burrowing his head into the soft fabric of George’s sweater, seeking shelter from the world that somehow, through all the pain and anguish, never stopped spinning. His head ached. “No, no, no. Don’t leave me.”

“Hey, I’m still here.” George’s voice sounded so soft, such a foreign tone on him. “And I will still be here when you wake up, I promise. You can rest now, Dream. No one will hurt you, I will make sure of that. You are not alone anymore. I got you, Dream.”

Oh, how often he had sat on hard obsidian stone, lava burning his skin and yet not being able to stop his body from freezing, waiting, yearning to hear those words, for someone to hug him and cradle him and hold him and never let him go.

And now that someone was finally here, by his side, not to hurt him but to hold him, all he could do was cry. And then cry a bit more.

“*You have a very old soul,*” Karl had said to him one mellow evening. They had sat on the front porch of their house, watching fireflies swirl over the smooth water surface of the pond in the center of Kinoko Kingdom, their dim glow the only light in the dark.

“*What does that mean.*”

“*I don’t know. It’s just... the way you carry yourself through the word. As if you are an old forest spirit caged in the body of a mortal.*”

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

The world around Sapnap is crumbling apart and for once he doesn't know what to do

TW: only slight mentioning of abuse at the very end

Chapter Notes

Yooo new chapter! This is actually my favorite one so far. I really love how it turned out, so I hope you guys enjoy it :D

I have a biology test and math exam next week so I'm not sure how often I will be able to upload new chapters but I will try my best.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The sun was out, drawing light patterns on the back of his skin. The branches of a maple tree shook with the melody of late October wind, lifting an explosion of red and yellow leaves up into the crisp air.

“Dream give it back! This isn't fair. You are taller than me and your legs are longer. I can't run as fast as you,” Sapnap screeched, trying to keep up with his friend who made running look like flying as he sprinted down the hill. Loud laughter echoed through the air, a shrill wheezing sound, so unique and so undeniably Dream and normally it was one of Sapnap's favorite things to listen to but right now it just added to his annoyance.

“Not my fault you are short!”

They arrived at the village on the foot of the hill and Sapnap could only stop and watch as Dream climbed up the pole of a streetlight with deft hands before balancing on the small house on top of the pole and taking a leap.

“Dream!” Letting out a cackle at Sapnap's concerned shout, his feet landed on the roof of a nearby building.

“Pandas,” Dream drew out, turning around to look down at his best friend with the biggest grin.

“Aww, you worried about me?”

“Bad said not to go up on rooftops anymore, Dream,” Sapnap pouted. “Get down here before you fall down and break something.”

“Fall? Me?” Dream put a hand on his heart, scrunching up his face in mock-hurt. “You wound me, Pandas. I'd never fall. Look!” And with that he started running again, over the uneven tiles of the roof, jumping across the red-brick chimney and over to the roof of the next house.

It was fascinating, mesmerizing to watch Dream; the way he moved with so much grace and precision, never missing or failing a jump. It was as if the surroundings morphed and bent to his

will. And Sappnap could only stand there and follow Dream with his eyes as he glided over rooftops, the cape on his back fluttering in the wind like green wings spreading up to the sky and Sappnap couldn't stop the smile from spreading across his face.

With a last, elegant jump to the ground, Dream landed right in front of his friend. One hand extended, he bowed down, smirking. "M'lady, I'm afraid you lost this."

"You are an idiot," Sappnap giggled, snatching the white headband from Dream's open palm. "Bad will kill you if he ever finds out what you just did,"

"That's why I can't leave any witnesses behind. Sorry, Sap." Before Sappnap could process the words, he was already on the floor, Dream on top of him and rolling through the dirt.

"Dream!"

"You okay, Sappnap?"

"Yeah."

"You are crying."

"Just a dream. Go back to sleep, Karl. I'm fine."

The low grumble of thunder rolled over the cloud covered sky. It was dark outside, despite it only being noon. The storm had been lurking over the grounds of Kinoko Kingdom for a while now and it didn't seem like it would go away any time soon.

George shuffled around in his seat on the armchair across Sappnap and Karl. There was something really off about him but Sappnap couldn't figure out what it was. His fingers kept fidgeting in his lap, something that was usually bound to only Karl and Dream's restless habits. His eyebrows were slightly furrowed and his lips pressed in a tight line. Everything about him screamed a terrific calmness. George looked like he was forcing his whole body and mind to a still.

Sappnap wasn't concerned, he really wasn't. The sobs and screams coming from Dream's room last night weren't still on his mind. They *weren't*. He didn't care about Dream's alarming behavior at dinner yesterday – no really, he didn't.

And if he was, then his dream from this morning would be to blame, for trying to throw him back into a past that didn't exist anymore, for trying to guilt trip him by forcing him to see his old friend again. His subconsciousness was trying to trick him into feeling pity for the tyrant with no heart.

So no, he really didn't notice that Dream hadn't left his room the whole day after his violent breakdown the other day, didn't nervously await what George had to tell them so urgently that he had dragged both him and Karl away from the dinner table the moment he stepped out of Dream's room. To make it short, he couldn't give less of a fuck about what happened – was happening – with Dream.

And then George finally opened his mouth and the words came gushing out like the water running

down the fountain next to the dragon statue outside, “I think Dream might’ve been possessed by the egg and everything he did, starting from the exile up until the prison, was the egg controlling him and making him believe that what he was doing was right, and that he had to do it in order for us all to become a happy family. And if that is true then that means that we really fucked up because we didn’t realize that our own best friend wasn’t really himself the whole time, and for the love of the prime gods we *really* fucked up.”

Talk about ripping off the Band Aid. George might have just reopened an old wound alongside it, Sapnap distantly thought. Because *oh gods he couldn’t breathe*.

Next to him on the couch, Karl opened his mouth, shut it, opened it again. “George, what?”

George didn’t answer immediately, drawing in shaky, unsteady breaths to try and prepare himself for what was about to come. After an endless and yet so finite pause he cleared his throat, sitting up straight in his seat.

And so George told them, recited what Dream had told him the day before, bringing back the same bitter taste that had clogged his tongue the night prior when he had desperately tried to calm a panicked Dream down and make sense of incoherent confessions and frantic pleading. George looked exhausted, as if his brain had gone beyond shock and terror into a feigned calmness and Sapnap just sat there and listened with a heart made out of void. And all he could think was that if he let his mind wander a little bit too far, if the words George were saying set in a little bit too much, his world might collapse and he would go down with it.

When George finally stopped talking, Sapnap felt like he was burning up. There was fire under his skin, in his lungs, shoving against his chest. He didn’t know if he felt like screaming or crying – he did neither. He just sat there, listening to Karl’s quiet gasps for air, feeling like he was slowly suffocating on thick smoke scorching his airways black.

“No,” he finally managed to push over numb lips. “He’s lying. He’s trying to trick you, trick us. Making up excuses like the filthy, manipulating liar he is.”

“Sapnap,” George tried softly.

“No, George. Can’t you see what he is doing? After all this time you should know better. He’s making up things so he doesn’t have to go back to prison.”

“Sap, *I* was the one who came to this conclusion. He didn’t even realize he was under control the whole time. Hell, he didn’t even wanna believe me, he practically screamed and *begged* me to take it back, to stop trying to make excuses on his behalf.” George choked out. His hands were both tightly gripping onto the cushion of the armchair he was sitting on, tears threatening to spill out.

No, George didn’t cry. Ever. Not when Dream started distancing himself, not when he pushed them away and made them hate him, not when they led him to prison. If this was big enough that it could break George, then Sapnap was already lost. He was trying to hold off the inevitable, he knew that. But that didn’t mean he couldn’t try to protect himself from the pain that awaited him. Even if it was a futile attempt.

“I know you heard us last night.” George’s voice barely held any heat but Sapnap flinched away regardless. “This is not an act and you know it.”

“He’s a tyrant, a manipulator, a horrible person. He’s a *monster*.” It was so, so much easier to be angry instead of hurting. And *oh*, he thought, suddenly he understood Dream a lot more.

A steady pressure spread across the palm of his hand. Sapnap looked down and then up into Karl's eyes that were tear filled and red rimmed. He silently shook his head.

"You should, uhm," George cleared his throat, snapping Sapnap's attention back around to him. "You are both kind of struggling with the same thing right now. Maybe you should just...go to him, talk to him."

It was a stupid idea considering that Sapnap had been ready to slice Dream's throat if he acted out of line only a day prior (*are you sure?*). Albeit, he still found himself standing in front of a closed door a few minutes later, anxiously listening to any noises coming from Dream's room. But it was dead silent. No shuffling of bed covers or creaking of floor boards. Nothing.

Letting out a sigh that was not only supposed to ease the growing ball of anxiety in his gut that was starting to make him nervous, but to also encourage his body to start moving forwards instead of turning around and running back to his fiancé and best friend who were both still in the living room to give him and Dream more privacy.

Sapnap huffed, one hand closing around the warm handle of the door, slowly pushing down. The storm was still continuing on its havoc over their heads as Sapnap hesitantly opened the door and entered the room. It was dark inside, despite pushed open curtains. The clouds in front of the big window didn't allow any rays of the sun to shine through and the light was off. It was barely anything to see outside, only icy rain getting whipped against the house front by the cruelty of the vigorous wind.

Still, Sapnap found Dream sitting on the window sill, legs pushed to his chest and observing the storm through the glass. He turned around when he heard Sapnap enter, eyes lighting up for a reason Sapnap didn't know. He looked at him like he was expecting Sapnap to do something but he just stood there and stared and the more silence filled the room, the more Dream's face began to fall.

He's seeking familiarity, his mind supplied him. He's waiting for you to scream at him.

His heart didn't clench painfully at that, it *didn't*.

"Are you here to tell me how much you hate me?" Sapnap pressed his lips together. Dream sounded so hopeful.

"Dream?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you believe you're the bad guy?"

Months spent hurting and mourning over a lost friend, nights filled with nightmares of utter betrayal. It had taking a tiny infinity for him to feel like he could breathe again. He had been so sure of his beliefs and actions, had sought comfort in finally knowing for sure and accepting that Dream didn't love them anymore. Because despite it being so, so painful, there was something relieving about realizing that the person you had been desperately trying to chase after had stopped turning around for you. It had taken a lot of the weight off his chest when he had finally realized that he could move on.

All this just for him to stand here in front of Dream and come to the horrifying conclusion that he had reached a dead end. He simply did not know how to move forward anymore. And in that

moment he thought he might not even want to.

“I... I don’t know anymore.”

“Me neither.”

It would be a long, twisted road for both of them to take but maybe they wouldn’t have to struggle through it alone.

It wouldn’t be easy. Their friendship had been damaged in a way that would take a long time to heal. But the way Dream looked up at him with big, shiny eyes that reflected so much of his own vulnerability and hurt and confusion, Sapnap believed that maybe not everything was lost.

And when Dream shifted a bit on the window sill to make space for one more person, he accepted it, carefully sneaking over to the opposite side of the room like a child trying not to get caught by doing something forbidden. Like back when Sapnap would tiptoe his way to Dream’s room to get into his bed for comfort and warmth, afraid to wake up Bad and get into trouble.

Not a single word was spoken as Sapnap curled up next to Dream, lying his head against the cool glass and looking through it. For the first time he was watching the world through Dream’s perspective in more than one way and it was both scary and fascinating at the same time.

Next to him, Dream breathed through the pain, the grief, with long, steady inhales, encouraging Sapnap to do the same.

An arm came around his shoulder, first hesitant, then moving with more confidence when Sapnap didn’t pull away, drawing him closer to the person he once called his best friend. Sapnap would love to call him that again, one day. And maybe he would get to do that sooner than he imagined.

Dream had his eyes closed when the door to his room opened and Karl and George came in. They didn’t say anything, didn’t ask questions and Dream was thankful for that. He wanted to keep the comfortable silence, wanted to lean further into the warmth at his side and fall asleep like this.

But he couldn’t. At least not on the window sill.

Sapnap was the first to move, holding out his hand in a shy but steady gesture. Dream took it, letting himself be led to his bed where they all lied down and cuddled up together – Dream in the middle, face buried in Sapnap’s chest and the comfy weight of George pressed to his back, Karl’s arm encircling Sapnap’s body to wrap a hand around Dream’s.

It was about taking and giving a rare kind of comfort. It was something Dream hadn’t experienced in a very long time, something that was so familiar but yet so foreign to him.

Dream didn’t know if he would ever be able to get used to gentle touches again, soft and so unconditional. He was so used to the agony blossoming beneath fingertips, forming bruises like the petals of flowers across his back and chest and legs. And maybe tomorrow would come and bring the long awaited pain. But for now he was content to stay here and bathe in the illusion of safety and belonging.

Chapter End Notes

More comfort?? Pog????

Both Sapnap and Dream are idiots and and not the best when it comes to talking things out but I promise they will have a proper conversation next chapter :)

(fun fact, i actually planned for Sapnap to yell at Dream for not being angry at him even tho Dream has all the rights to hate him because Sapnap never noticed that Dream was controlled by the egg and for Sapnap to have a full on breakdown while Dream's just like 'Sap, what are you talking about. i could never be angry at you, it's not your fault' but then i changed my mind and wanted some comfort real quick lol)

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Things aren't great but Sapnap and Dream finally talk a little bit more.

TW: self-harm, self-destructive thoughts, mentioning of torture and abuse

Chapter Notes

Hellooooo! Next chapter will probably be out on Thursday or Friday bc of the test and exam I'm having this week but I promise that the updates will come quicker once this week is finally over :)

Btw, hypothetically speaking...how much do you guys want me to go into depth about what happened to Dream before his arrival in Kinoko Kingdom (about his time in prison and the escape)? Just...hypothetically of course...

Today was a bad day.

Dream could tell by the way the world seemed a little bit less colorful and there seemed to be a weight lying on him, making it physically almost impossible to get out of bed.

So he stayed, watched rays of the sun creep up the walls of his room and listened to the birds outside his open window. The storm that had been hovering over the lands for the last couple of days had taken a break but the warm tension in the air served as a reminder that it would soon come back.

He ignored Patches when she tried to get him to move, nudging her little head against his arm until he swat her away. Watching her leave his room through the window made a satisfying bitterness bloom up in his heart.

He didn't know how long he laid there. Once, he could hear footsteps in the hallway stopping at his door before they continued making their way to the kitchen where the sizzling of a pan could be heard. He wasn't hungry so he didn't even make the effort to get up, only switching from his bed to the floor when his bones started to complain about the softness of the mattress.

Dream wanted to cry and scream and peel his skin off and he didn't even know why he suddenly felt like this. Yesterday, everything had been fine despite the shocking revelation of the day before. He'd woken up in a warm bed that hadn't made his back yearn for the harsh surface of his bedroom floor and body embraced in a tight hug that hadn't made him flinch away. Karl had made breakfast and Dream had been able to eat most of it without seeing Quackity standing in front of him, dragging the blades of shears up and down his arms the moment he tried to be stupid and think that he deserved to eat something.

He had even managed to push down the growing feeling of confusion and disbelief that people

would actually want to care for him, so unconditional and without any lasting consequences.

It had been going so well, such a stark contrast to the pathetic picture he was painting today, curled up on the floor, legs drawn to his chest and hands buried in his hair, tucking and scratching and hitting his scalp over and over again to get rid of the flashing images – barely more than a ghost and yet so vivid in all their glory, scorching his mind; a whip clawing at his flesh, the shock from the collar ripping through his limbs and the head of a hammer cracking against bones.

All for nothing, the voices sang their sinister tune. *All the pain you took upon you, all deaths you lived; all for nothing.*

He had been stripped of his beliefs, of the only thing that had kept him going in prison, the rock he'd been holding onto to not plunge into the floods of blood and agony but now there was nothing to hold onto anymore and he was drowning.

Today was a very bad day. He felt like he was dying.

He probably would have stayed there for the rest of the day, cramped up in a fetal position, somewhere in a chasm between the overwhelming feeling of being too alive and slowly dying. He was suffocating on tears that he couldn't shed and breaking skin with bitten off fingernails in an attempt to distract himself from the turmoil ripping him apart from the inside. But as the sun reached its highest point, shining bright and warm, as if mocking his downfall, there was a knock on the door, soft and hesitant. A second knock followed, more confident this time.

Dream opened his mouth – to invite or send the person away, he didn't know – but he had no voice left to speak and so the person decided for him, quietly cracking open the door and looking into the room.

Dream's back was turned towards the door and his limbs wouldn't want to cooperate enough to turn around so he pressed his head further into the cold of the floorboards and closed his eyes.

George moved softer than Sapnap did. Where the pyromaniac carried himself in a powerful stride, feet pushing down hard on the ground to move forward, his other best friend was quieter and more agile, like a cat on padded paws. It was something Dream had learned from years of living together with the two and never forgotten.

Even after a whole year of being separated, all Dream needed was to hear the dull thumps of feet hitting wood for him to know, blindly, even before the person had the chance to open their mouth, "Dream?"

Gods, they might as well be kids again, Pandas nervously standing in the door frame, trying to bring up the courage to ask Dream if he could sleep in his bed for tonight. It had been such a long time since he had allowed himself to let these memories in. He had done everything to keep them away from the prison, too scared to accidentally taint the only light in his life.

He wanted to answer Sapnap, to comfort him and tell him that everything would be okay like he used to, to pull him under the covers of his bed and keep him safe. But he couldn't, it was too late. Time brought change and Dream didn't think it could ever go back to how it used to. Like a wise man once said, some things just weren't meant to be.

"Dream, are you awake?"

He shifted his position a little bit. It was all he could do. Holding his breath, he waited for Sapnap

to make the next move, to leave the room or come closer. A part of him, selfish and egoistic, wanted him to stay. He drove his nails a tad further into his skull.

There was rustling before Sapnap cleared his throat and the floor boards creaked again, indicating that Sapnap was moving towards him. For a moment, Dream swore his heart forgot how to beat.

He didn't know what he expected. For Sapnap to scream at him again like he did so many times before? For him to hug him again like he had done two days ago?

Sapnap did neither. He just knelt down next to Dream's shivering body and let the silence embrace both of them in its heaviness.

There was an awkward cough, a weak attempt to initiate a conversation but Dream kept still. It took Sapnap a whole minute to carve in, "I uh, just wanted to check up on you. Karl said you haven't eaten anything yet."

Sighing when he got no answer, he continued. "Karl is pretty worried, you know. And George, too, even if he's better at hiding it. Are you...are you like, okay, dude?"

A muffled chuckle escaped Dream before he could hold it back. His whole body went rigid before a small laughter from behind him washed the tension back out. "Sorry, stupid question. You obviously aren't."

There was more rustling. Then, for a fleeting moment, something brushed against his back before Sapnap settled down a few inches away from him. He didn't need to look around to know that Sapnap had laid down on the floor as well, body pressing into the uncomfortable floor.

"It's weird," Sapnap spoke up again after a while. "Speaking to you. It used to be so easy, holding conversations, laughing and bantering. Now, it seems like there is a wall between us. And," he trailed off, searching for words that would do their past justice, if only a little. "And I know that, although you were the one to build those walls, it is my fault for not trying to break them down sooner. I just...this has been on my mind for a while now and I think now is the right time to finally say it out loud. But uh, can you maybe turn around? Or not," he immediately scrambled to explain. "Do whatever you feel comfortable with, okay? I just really...I really wanna see your face right now while I talk and-"

Dream didn't let himself think it over as he turned around until he lay on his back, face tilted to his left so he could look into Sapnap's eyes. The vulnerability they reflected almost made him turn away again, nearly unbearable as they focused on him.

"Thank you," Sapnap whispered, voice breaking.

For a moment, they just stared at each other, taking in the way each others soul was stripped bare in front of the other, welling up with pure, untamed emotions.

"All this time that you were gone, I missed you," Sapnap started up again. "Despite everything you put us through, a part of me was childish to hope that you would come back and everything would be forgiven. But then time passed and you were still gone and I felt so betrayed and disappointed and sad. But also confused because I didn't understand why you would just do that to us. And I think that's the worst part about it."

Sapnap breathed out, not letting go of their eye contact as tears dimmed his bright amber eyes. "I knew the way you were acting was so out of character. But I let myself be blinded by my sorrow, didn't listen to all the alarm bells ringing in my head, screaming at me that something wasn't quite

right. And then, one day, it was just so much easier to hate than to mourn.”

Tears were silently slipping down his cheeks. Dream could see the way his mouth clammed shut, trying to swallow the sobs threatening to break free. He didn’t want to interrupt Sapnap, too scared to break the vulnerability and intimacy of the moment, so he just lifted up his arm, whipping the tears away from Sapnap’s skin and pushed down the urge to pull him into a hug.

“I want my best friend back and I feel selfish, because I was the one pushing you further away and not helping you even though something was clearly wrong,” Sapnap whispered the words into the air as if he was afraid they would be the catalyst to something he wasn’t sure he was ready for quiet yet.

Dream couldn’t hold back any longer, hands coming up to clumsily form gestures. It had been a while since he last used sign language, couldn’t even remember the last time he had spoken to Callahan and he tried to ignore the way his heart bled from thinking about it.

Still holding eye contact with Sapnap to make sure he had all his attention, he moved his hands, trusting them to be his voice where his own failed him.

‘I forgive’

His hope died like the flames of a candle when he didn’t get a response but the surge of relief and frustration that washed over Sapnap’s expression was all he needed to know to calm his growing anxiety.

“You shouldn’t”

Dream let out a huff, hands moving faster to form sentences. He needed Sapnap to understand. *‘I never blamed you for what happened. Not even once. I was a horrible person and you deserved to be angry at me. I am too.’*

“Dream, that wasn’t you-” Dream gave him a sad smile, silencing him with a single hand gesture.

‘Do you forgive me?’

A sharp exhale left Sapnap’s mouth as his eyebrows scrunched up in confusion. “Yes, yes of course.”

Closing his eyes, Dream drew in a deep breath. And waited.

Back in prison, he’d had a lot of time, between clawing at the walls of obsidian and screaming until he had no voice left, he had often just laid on the cold floor and let his mind spiral. He hadn’t dared to fall asleep for most of the time, too scared to wake up choking on his own blood. So he’d forced his eyes to stay open and had let his mind wander. He couldn’t count how many times he had imagined this moment, how often he had laid there, wide awake, wishing for nothing more than his best friends to forgive him.

And now that the day had finally come, Dream didn’t know what to say. He didn’t know what he was waiting for; for relief to untie the knot in his chest or desperation to scrap at the inside of his rib cage?

Neither happened. His heart stayed numb.

Opening his eyes again, he looked up to the ceiling, watching the patterns of light paint pale yellow streaks against the walls as realization hit him.

Why?’

To his right, Sapnap shifted into a more comfortable position to get a better look at him. He could feel his eyes on his face, flickering over every scar and every little flaw they could find, “What do you mean why?”

I don’t even forgive myself. ‘There was no bitterness or sadness behind the signs, just utter and complete defeat.

Dream flinched when Sapnap suddenly jumped into an upright position, eyes widened as he grabbed Dream’s arms in a grip that was deterrent, tight but not enough to hurt. “Dream, Gods, it wasn’t your fault. How many times do we have to tell you that. You stubborn idiot. It was the egg making you do all those horrible things, do you understand that?”

Biting his tongue to silence his own sobs, Dream turned his head away.

Your fault, your fault, your fault.

Sometimes, when he closed his eyes, he still felt bones crack under his fists as Tommy’s skull crashed into red obsidian, could still hear Georges voice, full of venom and betrayal.

“Just tell me you hate me.”

“Dream,” Sapnap’s voice cut through the fog of the past, stern, “It wasn’t your fault. You can forgive yourself.

I can’t, ‘Dream signed, trembling, vehemently shaking his head.

He couldn’t forgive himself; there were so many reasons why he couldn’t. Why couldn’t Sapnap understand that.

“Hey,” said Sapnap, suddenly so much softer as if he was afraid that Dream would break apart between his fingers. Maybe he would, or he already had, Dream couldn’t tell anymore.

Prime, he hated being weak. He felt pathetic but that didn’t stop the tears from escaping his eyes.

“It’s fine,” Sapnap whispered. But it really wasn’t. “We will figure this out. It’s okay if you can’t forgive yourself just yet. It took me some time, too. But it’s gonna be alright, okay?”

He couldn’t do anything but nod. It was all Sapnap needed to finally draw him into a hug. And Dream let him, melting into his arms and closing his eyes. There were hands running through his hair. They felt nice against his scalp that still felt sensitive from the assault of his own hands earlier. Sapnap fingers were so much more gentle, carefully combing through his strands and brushing away the tension in his bones.

“Bad would be excited to see your hair this long,” Sapnap broke the silence after a while. Dream’s lips pulled up in a quiet chuckle. “He really loved to braid it and stick flowers and stuff into your locks when we were younger.”

Dream’s hand came up to his hair, as if he was reaching for the phantom of a flower. Then, he reached out his fingers, poking them against Sapnap’s own hair that was spilling over the white headband, wrapped around his head.

“My hair?” Sapnap asked, earning him a nod against his shoulder. “Yeah, he did the same with my hair, too before I cut it. Prime Gods, remember the space buns he would always put mine in?”

Dream could hear the low chuckle vibrate in his friend's chest he was leaning against. He nodded again, giggles spilling out of his mouth, not being able to hold them back any longer. He felt Sapnap's head tilt down and his eyes on him. Looking up he was met with the widest grin he had seen on Sapnap in a while. Shyly, he returned the smile, flushing.

An almost foreign feeling spread across his chest and it took him a second to identify it. He hadn't felt this warmth seeping into his heart ever since he had left Techno's cabin behind.

'The space buns looked nice on you. I bet Karl would love them,' Dream signed up to him. Sapnap's grin grew even wider.

"Bet. Unfortunately my hair isn't long enough anymore. Maybe I grow it back out. Or not," Sapnap added, seeing Dream grimace. "Oh come on, I didn't look that bad with long hair."

Dream shook his head, burying his head into Sapnap's chest to hide the smug smirk gracing his lips when Sapnap huffed in mock offense. "Dream," he whined. "That's so mean."

His cheeks were aching and it was stupid, not even that funny but he couldn't stop grinning, whole body feeling strangely weightless. Sapnap's arms around him tightened a tad and he sunk against him a bit more, grinning softening out into a gentle smile.

He'd almost forgotten what having a best friend felt like.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Dream and George share a sweet moment together. Sapnap discovers something.

TW: Suicidal thoughts, mentioning aftermath of torture and abuse

Chapter Notes

Wohooo exams are over - at least for now. I don't have any school for the next two weeks which means I can focus more on the story. Next chapter will be out on Sunday. To all the DNF lovers, enjoy the chapter ;)

Back when he was still with Techno, healing had felt like tides crashing against the ocean shore before they were pulled back out into the unknown again. It didn't matter how many times Techno had brought him back from another nightmare or flashback with reassuring words, how often he had sat beside his bed and read out of one of his books so Dream wouldn't have to deal with the suffocating silence. Because, in the end, the cold, merciless grip of the water would always drag him back away from whatever winding road of recovery had laid in front of him.

Still, Techno had tried his best. He had barely left his side in the first few weeks of just lying in bed, too weak to even move a single limb. Dream didn't think he would ever be able to repay him for what he had done for him.

After the escape, it had taken him six days to wake up from the sleep his battered and bruised body had forced him into. Three more weeks until his legs had been steady enough to hold him up for more than a few minutes. Two months before Phil had finally allowed him to pick up a sword again (and another two whole weeks for him to be able to look at the sharp blade without ending up in another panic attack).

Through it all, Techno had been there, teaching him how to live again, to eat and talk without needing permission, how to move on despite knowing what was behind.

He didn't know where he would be now if Techno hadn't broken him out of prison. The obvious answer was that he'd probably be still locked up, getting tortured again and again and again but something told him that he wouldn't have made it to another one of Quackity's sessions; not when he had been so tired, so *exhausted*.

Techno-fucking-blade had the best timing in the world – or the worst, depending on how Dream wanted to look at it. He had the best timing and he didn't even know it. How could he, it was one of the few things Dream had kept from him, even when the guilt of keeping secrets and the weight of those memories had turned the nightmares even more violent.

Healing in Kinoko Kingdom was like gently swaying on a rock in the middle of a sea full of sharks; one wrong move and he would fall into their hungry mouths, ready to rip him apart again.

Being here was a slow learning process for all of them. It was about accepting his and their past, coming to terms with the new revelation that unveiled a new chasm in their life, a new obstacle they had to overcome.

It was odd, how fast Dream and Sapnap fell back into place, like lost puzzle pieces, finally being back in their foregone places – or maybe it wasn't surprising at all. It should scare Dream, should make him want to push Sapnap away again because at the end of the day, there was a monster inside him and it would always be there. He couldn't guarantee that he wouldn't hurt Sapnap again. Like Quackity had told him so many times before, no matter how hard he tried, he would always fall back into old habits, would hurt and manipulate and lie. It was something that was so deeply carved into his very being and the only way to keep the monster locked inside him, was through pain.

Dream didn't want to hurt Sapnap. But every time the younger leaned into him or hugged him, he couldn't help but melt into him. He still flinched away from sudden touches, but Sapnap learned. Gods, he learned so fast, starting to make noises to make sure Dream knew that he was coming up from behind, asking before touching. And maybe that was the reason why Dream didn't want to distance himself from his friends again. Because, despite everything that happened, they cared about him. And that realization was both terrifying and made a foreign warmth spread inside his chest.

Still, no matter how hard he tried, the bitter feeling under his tongue refused to leave, always making sure to leave a harsh aftertaste behind, no matter how many sweets he tried to swallow.

A few days ago Sapnap had asked Dream to join them at the fireplace in front of their house. Dream had accepted the invite after awhile.

Sitting in the dark, gazing up to the fire flies and sparks of the bonfire in the air and down to the slowly dying embers at his feet, he'd watched Karl and Sapnap laugh about a memory that had been created in his absence, had smiled when George had shared a piece of his twist bread and had leaned into Sapnap's arms that the younger had confidently slung over his shoulder somewhere through the night.

He had sat there, warmth spreading through his body but never truly reaching his heart, too cold was the past still clinging onto him.

Here, healing wasn't really about moving forward. He couldn't do that, not as long as he kept so many secrets from them, so many things left unsaid and trauma untouched.

He had been able to tell Techno about Quackity because with him, Dream didn't have to worry about making his friend choose between a person he loved and someone who used to be his best friend. He knew how much Sapnap and Karl still cared about Quackity even though they hadn't seen him in a while. They talked regularly about him, with shimmering eyes and wide smiles. Dream had already destroyed so much, had taken away enough of their happiness. He couldn't take Quackity away from them, too.

So he shut his mouth, was quiet every time Quackity was brought up and forbid himself to be selfish for once.

He tried to act like he was okay. He couldn't stand the pity and concern in the eyes of the others, but his acts were fruitless. They could hear him scream at night through the walls, gave him knowing glances every time he flinched away from something or skipped a meal. He didn't want to

be a burden, made sure that his door was locked when he was having another panic attack or break down but he couldn't stop them from worrying and he hated it.

Sapnap was especially persistent and clingy. He had been hesitant at first, about being around Dream again but after a while he had started bathing in the comfort Dream's presence gave him, had stayed by his side wherever he went, as if he wanted to make up for all the time they had spent apart.

And although Dream would never admit it out loud, he had slowly started to grow accustomed to the presence of Karl, George and Sapnap as well.

In Kinoko Kingdom, healing was like a mountain he didn't think he was able to crest yet, didn't even know if he was capable of such. But with how things were at the moment, he didn't think he would mind staying at the bottom of the mountain for a while.

There was something beautifully haunting about how the mist carried itself over the water in the early morning hours.

For an endless moment George was caught up standing in the door frame, watching Dream's silhouette move through the twilight. He didn't seem like he was doing anything in particular, just strolling around the Kingdom with no goal in mind.

From where George was standing, he could see Dream's shoulders slump over with the weight of another sleepless night. His heart clenched just thinking about the younger man's screams that had woken him up in the middle of the night for the fifth time this week. George wished Dream would trust them enough to leave his door unlocked, wanting nothing more than to bring his friend into an embrace and never let go again.

Dream had always had troubles sleeping, whether it was his own dreams turning on him or insomnia keeping him on the brink of being awake for days on end. Going for a walk had always helped calm his stormy mind no matter what time it was. It was something that seemingly hadn't changed, not even years later.

There was a sudden pressure on his leg, startling him out of his thoughts. He looked down, heterochromatic eyes meeting the soft brown fur of Patches back.

"Well hello there," giggled George, crouching down to scratch the feline behind her ears. She purred, pressing more against him, her tail curling around his ankle. When Dream had first brought her home, George had been convinced that she hated him. Seeing her openly lean into his pets made him smile.

"She likes you." His eyes flickered up to where Dream was now towering over him. Huffing, George stood back up again. He hadn't even heard him approach.

"What are you doing out here so early," George asked, studying the man in front of him. A black shirt hung loosely over his upper body, gray pants hugging his hips. His hair, longer than George could remember it ever been, was put into a bun, messy and without much care. He looked like he had just rolled out of bed but the dark shadows beneath his eyes told George that he hadn't even touched his bed in at least two days.

“Couldn’t sleep.” George raised an eyebrow but kept his mouth shut. “What about you?”

“Went to bed earlier. Just wasn’t tired anymore.” Dream nodded, letting a comfortable silence wash over them. It was almost scary how easy it was for Dream to fall back into their lives, how little it took for them to get used to him being here again. Not that George minded too much.

“Hey, Dream?”

“Yeah?”

“Dance with me?”

For a moment, Dream just stared at him with an uncertain expression before a small smirk graced his lips. It made George’s stomach flutter and heart beat faster. Gods, how much he had missed Dream’s smile.

“You can dance?”

“Oh, shut up,” George laughed, playfully shoving him.

“We don’t even have any music here.”

“Maybe I can do something about that.” Stepping back a few steps, George closed his eyes, concentrating all of his senses on nature around him. He could feel Dream’s curious gaze on him, like a warm hand against his skin. Smiling, George let his mind sink into the ground, up to the sky and through the crisp morning air. He woke up the birds sitting in the tree tops, encouraged the wind to pick up and howl its own little song around them.

Opening his eyes again, he saw Dream looking at him with an unreadable expression. George cocked his head to the side. “I don’t know what it is but a few months ago I found out that I could influence the environment a bit. Cool, right? I swear to the prime gods, this server loves me or something.”

Dream muttered something under his breath that sounded suspiciously like “*I wonder why*” before holding out his hand, “I believe a handsome gentleman just asked for a dance with his favorite person?”

“You are such an idiot.”

“Yeah, but I’m *your* idiot,” Dream cackled and George didn’t say anything because Dream was right and he was standing in front of him, looking so happy and Gods, George didn’t even remember the last time he saw him with a big, genuine smile, without any apologies following.

George held his breath and accepted the offered hand in front of him, letting out a surprised yelp when Dream pulled him forward, using the momentum to spin him around.

“It’s gonna rain soon,” laughed George, letting Dream lead them into a messy attempt of a dance. George was sure he’d seen Eret and Niki pull off at some fancy gala last summer.

“I don’t care,” Dream drew out, the beginning of a wheeze bubbling up.

They swung through the mist and dew covered meadows, the sound of the wind sweeping across grass blades and the chirping of the birds drawing them into their own little bubble as they held each other tight that not even the void could break them apart in that moment.

They were terrible at dancing, tripping and stumbling over each other but they didn't care, whirling around until they were breathless and dizzy.

Just like George had predicted it, the first few drops of rain fell down from gray clouds but it only fueled the matching grins on their faces. It was wet and slippery and cold and gross, their clothes grass-strained and stuck to their skin but they just laughed and continued spinning around.

George didn't dare to close his eyes even when the rain stung in his open eyes. He didn't want to tear his gaze away from Dream who looked so joyful and happy, throwing back his head to let the downfall hit his bare skin. He looked as if he was feeling the touch of the rain for the first time in forever and for all George knew, it was probably true.

They finally came to a stop when the sun was already climbing up the sky, leaving a rosy, gold pattern behind. The twilight was chased away and the strong rays of light created a juxtaposition of icy rain and warm sun.

They looked stupid, soaked in rain, clothes and hair stuck to their body and loopy grins on their faces, still holding each other, neither of them daring to break eye contact first.

George lifted a hand, pressing it against Dream's cheek that felt flaming hot under his fingertips. He stroked over a long scar reaching up to his forehead, drinking in every inch of exposed skin. Seeing Dream without his mask, without a barrier between him and the world, without the wall he often hid behind, was relieving. It had been so long since he had been able to look into his eyes that always reminded him of a field of sunflowers. Seeing him like this, so vulnerable and bare to him and the world, reminded George that Dream was human, that he was here and not the unreachable, sturdy stone he wanted people to believe he was.

"I thought I lost you," he whispered, pressing their foreheads together and finally closing his eyes, focusing on the feeling of the warm body pressed to his.

"Me too," Dream murmured back, voice hoarse. George ignored the tears glinting in his eyes, focusing on the still present smile stretched across Dream's lips.

"I missed you."

"Me too."

"I'm sorry," George continued because he still felt like it wasn't enough, so many words left unsaid for so many months. He needed to get it out, all the sorrows and pain that had kept him away from reality and locked in the sweet delusion of sleep for a very long time.

"I had you, and then I let you go and drift away from me and Sapnap and everyone else. But now," he pressed on, clinging onto Dream like he was afraid that the rain would wash him away. "Now I got you, Dream. I got you and I will never let you go again, ever. I promise."

Pulling him into the tightest hug he could muster, he buried his face into the wet fabric of Dream's shirt, taking in the comforting scent of his best friend – *no longer a stranger again*.

"That was so corny," he could hear Dream mutter under his breath and he swatted him away, rolling his eyes at the snickers that escaped Dream's mouth before pulling him back in, pressing his lips onto Dream's before the taller could add another stupid comment and ruin the moment further.

Dream immediately melted into the kiss, lips moving against and with George's. It wasn't the first time they kissed and far from the last time but it was the first time they did it so openly, no stolen kisses behind the shadow of a building or locked behind their walls and it was the first time without any heat or urgency.

"I love you." The words were spoken quietly, tender.

George sighed against Dream's lips, bringing him closer to his own body. "I know."

Dream never expected something back from him and George thought that might be the reason why he fell for him so easily, so effortlessly. He didn't push or pry. He just gave and gave and one day George promised himself that he would give back.

Before sneaking into the room that was obviously not his, Sapnap made sure that he was alone in the hallway and that the door to the living room was shut properly. It wasn't the first time he was on his way to commit the biggest crime of them all: stealing a hoodie from one of his best friends.

They were big and soft and smelled of comfort and familiarity and you really couldn't blame Sapnap at all. It wasn't his fault that his best friends had better hoodies than him.

Lately, he had been stealing a lot of hoodies from Dream, curling up in the warmth at night, seeking shelter from the screams that the nightmares ripped out of Dream. He couldn't help, couldn't give Dream comfort because Dream still pushed them away. He had always done that, even before the war and destruction. Dream hated feeling weak so he rather endured bone crushing agony alone than let anyone see him in such a vulnerable state. And there was nothing Sapnap could do about it.

So no, no one could judge him for wanting something to sooth his nerves and distract him, make him feel like the world was still okay, like back when he was a kid, watching Dream jump from rooftop to rooftop.

The room was flooded with light falling through the open window, a few clothes scattered across the floor and papers covering the desk on the opposite wall.

Picking up the hoodie that was the closest to him, Sapnap furrowed his brows, curiosity spurring him on and making his legs move until he stood in front of the desk, looking over the messy surface. Did Dream pick up writing again?

His stomach and heart sank at the same time, air being punched out of his lungs as his eyes fixated onto the piece of paper that was right in front of him. He wanted to stop reading the second his mind could process the words written on the crinkled, worn down paper but he couldn't, frozen in place and unable to do anything but continue reading as icy dread washed over him to the point of vertigo.

Sapnap,

I don't know what happened, where I turned the wrong way, when I lost you – when I became something not even I recognize when I take off the mask. The person you once new started to slip

away and now I think he's gone forever. I like to believe he managed to get away from all of this, maybe he found a place to rest, not here but somewhere else, far far away.

I tried to convince myself I did all the things for us; for us to be happy, to be together. But not even I can fool myself anymore.

And as I'm writing these words, hands shaky and blood messing up the last bit of paper I have left, it all becomes clear.

There is no escaping anymore.

And when the day has come I want you to be ready to lay me down onto the grass, to be ready to close my eyes. I want you to be the one, brother. For where it started with us two, it will come to an end.

Hold George when he mourns, mourn with him and then mourn a little bit more; then move on.

Find a place where you can stay, between dark oak forests and open meadows. Find a still lake to build your first house on, go fishing and get pets to fight over. Let the world continue spinning and spin with her.

Let fall bleed into winter, let winter melt into spring. Let buildings raise from the ground like flowers out of fresh soil. Find yourselves a new home. Do it one more time. But this time without me.

It is time to continue your story without me, without an antagonist in it. It is time to write yourself the happy ending you deserve.

Farewell, Pandas

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Sapnap confronts Dream.

TW: suicidal thoughts, dissociation, slight derealization, panic attack

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Hey Dream, can I have the glass of water to your right?”

“I don’t know,” Dream said, turning around to George with a sly grin, “Can you?”

“I hate you.”

“You love me,” he laughed, grabbing the glass of water that sat on a small coffee table next to his armchair. “Say pretty please?”

George scoffed, “You know what? Never mind, I’m not thirsty anymore.”

“Dream, be nice to Gogy,” Karl scolded him, flopping down onto the couch next to George.

The wind was howling an eerily melody outside their house, dark storm clouds hung on the sky like a bad omen. The weather had been bad for a couple of days now and although Dream enjoyed cozy days inside, spent in front of a crackling fire (it reminded him of Techno’s cabin, making his heart ache and warm up at the same time), Dream was getting restless. He wanted to go outside, explore the forest and the fields and hills surrounding Kinoko Kingdom. It was a foreign feeling, something he hadn’t felt in such a long time and Dream didn’t know what to do with it.

Giving George his glass of water, he let himself sink into the soft cushion of the big armchair closest to the fireplace. A faint orange glow tinted the living room, so much milder than the blazing heat of the lava back in his cell, so much less blinding and burning and consuming.

He closed his eyes, bathing in the comforting warmth. His limbs were aching from another sleepless night and his shoulder was radiating a dull pain up to his neck, an old scar that liked to remind Dream of its presence every now and then.

A silence had spread across the room, Karl occupied with reading a book while George was starrng absently into the fire, mind seemingly somewhere else. Dream could feel himself slowly flowing away, body relaxing as the tides of sleep softly pulled him away.

This is nice, he decided. *This is really, really nice.*

Loud footsteps and the sound of a door colliding with the wall abruptly dragged him back into the world of wakefulness. His head snapped around to where Sapnap was standing in the room, the shadows from the hallway crawling over his shoulder. Dream could see tremors traveling through

his body, hands clenched around some piece of paper like his life depended on it. Dream opened his mouth to say something, ask what was wrong, but when he locked eyes with Sapnap all words died on his tongue.

He knows.

“Dream, what is this?” He held up the piece of paper between quivering fingers, face pale and eyes wide. His voice sounded so shaken up, so scared – like he was asking for knowledge he didn’t want to hold.

Dream got up from the armchair, immediately being swarmed by the feeling of regret as he left the only thing behind that was keeping him grounded. “Sap- it’s not- it’s nothing.” *Liar.*

Cold dread washed over him at the same time as hot panic spread across his chest and climbed up his throat. His voice was shaky and he hated it because he knew the others could hear it; hated it because he knew there was no way he could convince them that it was nothing.

“Dream, stop.” It wasn’t a plead, it was a warning. Dream’s throat constricted as he tried to swallow, tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth. His clothes felt too tight, too hot on his burning skin.

“What is going on?” Karl tried to step in, eyes darting to Sapnap, to Dream, then back to Sapnap. He frowned when he got no answer, helplessly looking to George who was as lost as he was. “Sapnap, what is that?”

“That’s what I’m asking Dream,” Sapnap said. Dream could hear the edge in his tone where fear and shock were clashing against each other. Hiding would be futile.

“Listen Sapnap. I know what it looks like but I promise you, I wrote this months ago. It is from... from back when I was in prison and not in a good headspace. It means nothing anymore,” Dream pleaded, voice cracking as he desperately tried to push down memories of nights spent lying wide awake, thoughts circling back to the letter over and over again as the haunting images of his past clawed on his mind, leaving scars not only on bare skin. How many times had he thought about the letter since he was here in Kinoko? How many times had he repeated the words in his head, over and over again.

‘It means nothing anymore.’ A lie had never slipped this easily off his tongue.

“If it means nothing anymore,” Sapnap said, voice barely above a whisper. “Then why did you keep it. Why didn’t you throw it away the moment you escaped the prison. Why do you still have it even though it’s been months.”

Dream could only stand there in the middle of the living room and stare at Sapnap, not knowing how to answer.

How could he hide if there was nothing to hide behind anymore.

He could hear his heart beating against his chest, the blood rushing through his ears but everything else became muffled, as if a wall of water was separating him from the others. Everything was just too much. It was so much easier to take a step back, to detach himself from the world, from the bright shine of the fire, the loud growling of the storm and the burning words coming from Sapnap.

Bubbling, steaming lava, calling him, reaching for him. So easy, so alluring. But he couldn’t. It was Sapnap’s to take, to fulfill. The promise, the threat - no longer a threat. Welcoming. He didn’t want to be here anymore, so exhausting, so tired. Please.

Too much, too much, too much.

“Dream, please don’t lie. Just tell me the truth. I wanna understand. I came into your room to get a hoodie and then I saw this piece of paper on your desk and first I thought you might have started writing again – you know, like you used to back when we were younger – but it wasn’t and I just-”

“Sapnap?”

“Not now, Karl, please. I’m not mad at you, Dream. But I just don’t understand why-”

“Sapnap, hey,” Karl tried to cut off Sapnap’s rambling a second time, stopping him with a firm hand on his shoulder. “Look.”

And Sapnap looked. Between tears and blinding fear he glanced over at Dream who was still standing in the middle of the room, eyes on him but something was off about him. His body seemed locked in place, eyes looking but not *seeing*.

“Dream?” The blonde didn’t respond. Sapnap swallowed dryly, stepping closer. “Hey, Dream can you hear me?”

“Did he go into shock or something?” George asked, brows furrowed in worry and concern. Karl chewed on his lip, anxiously shifting in place. “I don’t know. I think he...” he took a deep breath. “I think he dissociated.”

Dread spread in Sapnap’s stomach. “Did I- did I do that?”

Oh gods, *oh gods*. He just sent his best friend into a trauma response.

His heart felt like it was trying to break out of his rib cage, hammering against his chest. Shock and fear from the revelation of the letter pushed against guilt and even more panic. This was his fault. Dream had dissociated because of him, because he couldn’t shut up for a second and think. What had he been thinking, confronting Dream like that despite knowing how unstable he was, how much he avoided talking about what happened to him.

Sapnap was *stupid, stupid, stupid*.

“Hey, hey, Sapnap. I need you to calm down and breathe with me, can you do that?” Someone was in front of him, lifting his arm and placing his hand against something solid. It moved up and down in a grounding rhythm and subconsciously he began to copy the steady in- and exhales from the person in front of him, letting them guide him back into reality.

“That’s it, love. You are doing amazing. There you go. You back with us?”

Blinking away the haze of panic, he locked eyes with Karl who was standing in front of him, giving him a reassuring smile. “There you are.”

“What happened.” His voice was hoarse, grinding against his throat painfully. He winced.

“Looks like you had a panic attack. Are you okay?”

Sapnap nodded shakily, letting Karl lead him to the couch next to a burned down fireplace. Feeling a little less disorientated and more grounded, he looked around, spotting George next to the other

couch, crouching down in front of Dream who was still unresponsive and frozen in place, not moving save for the sluggish blinks here and then.

“Here,” Karl said, handing Sapnap a glass of water. It felt soothing against the back of his throat and he let out a relieved sigh that brought him a small giggle from Karl.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled after a moment of silence. “I didn’t mean to trigger this. I was just so terrified and confused when I found the letter.”

“Shh, it’s okay,” Karl reassured him, drawing circles across his back. “Do you mind telling us what was in the letter?”

Wordlessly, Sapnap handed him the piece of paper that was still in one of his hands, not trusting his voice to carry a whole conversation. His stomach churned when he noticed the brown stains on the crinkled paper. *Dried blood.*

“Oh,” was all Karl said when he finished reading. Something sharp flashed in his eyes before he managed to push it back.

“Yeah, oh.”

Karl handed George the letter before turning back around to Sapnap, taking his hands in his and squeezing them, making sure that he had the younger’s full attention. “Don’t beat yourself up, Sap. Maybe the way you confronted him wasn’t the best, but no one could know that he would react like this. None of us know the true extend of whatever is going on with Dream right now – how could we if he doesn’t tell us anything. But we’ll figure it out, okay? He’s going to be okay.”

Sapnap nodded, eyes still fixated on Dream who just sat there, starring into nothing, lazily blinking, chest moving up and down in steady in- and exhales. It was hard to believe that Dream would ever be okay again. Not after the letter, not after the way he reacted.

Sapnap just wished Dream would accept help, that he didn’t have to go through this alone.

“Why am I sitting on the couch,” was the first thing that left his lips, even before he could fully take in his surroundings. There were hands on his back, drawing funny patterns over the soft material of his hoodie. His first reaction was to recoil, to move away from the hand because touch meant pain, always. Even the gentlest gesture was followed by a hit or a punch or a blade drawing blood.

But this time the hand didn’t move away or grew harsher. It stayed, a comforting presence on his back, and continued drawing patterns.

“Dream, it’s George. You’re safe, it’s alright.”

“George.” It was a strange feeling, hearing your voice, knowing your mouth is moving but not feeling like you are the one saying it. His body didn’t seem like it belonged to him. As if he was sitting in the passenger seat of a car. “I’m sitting on a couch. I wasn’t sitting on a couch a second ago. Why am I sitting on a couch.”

“You dissociated, Dream. You were gone for like an hour.”

An hour. What-

He knew he dissociated from time to time (something taking its roots in one of the many torture sessions) but he had never known how long the episodes lasted. Hearing it out loud was scary.

“You stayed.” He didn’t know why this statement meant so much to him, why it made his cheeks wet and tugged at his heart. It only meant that he had grown too attached and this realization should have made him want to run away, far, far away like he had done with Techno. But his last episode he had spent all alone, scared and confused, and this time they had stayed and the hands on his back never stopped and there was a heavy warmth pressed against his side that must be Sapnap because Dream could smell fire smoke and cinnamon and he knew it shouldn’t have such a soothing effect on him but he couldn’t help but sink further into the couch behind him and take a deep breath.

“I’m sorry,” he could hear Sapnap whisper next to him. “I didn’t mean to trigger you. I’m so sorry.”

Dream remembered an old memory, already covered with dust and having been pushed far, far back into his mind but once it flared back to life, the images were as vivid as the strands of Sapnap’s hair tickling the side of his neck and the crackling of the newly light fire.

Dream had been climbing a tree, back when he was so much younger, a firm grip against the rough bark and steady feet on a thick branch when Sapnap had shouted something from down below, distracting him and making him miss the next jump. The collision with the forest floor had been painful, skin scraping across the hard ground and arm twisting in a weird angle.

He didn’t remember if he had screamed but the next thing he’d known was that his face was pressed into wet soil and Sapnap was next to him, crying and muttering an apology over and over again. No matter how many times Dream had reassured him that he was okay, Sapnap hadn’t stopped anxiously biting at his lip and repeatedly mumbling “*sorry*” into his shoulder.

It was how Dream had realized that sometimes it was better to let the younger ramble and get everything out of his chest before it suffocated him. It was such a stark contrast to the way Dream would swallow every fear, every guilt down until he was choking on every untold confession and bottled up concern.

Maybe that was why he was so determent for Sapnap to let everything out, that he said sorry again and again until the bitter feeling of regret and guilt was washed away and forgiven.

“I’m sorry – so, so, sorry.”

“I know, Sap. You’re okay, *we* are okay.” It was like an instinct, a deeply rooted urge to pull Sapnap closer and comfort him – something that had been suppressed for the past few months, a flame that had been ignited again, coming back in full force. If he had the power, he would bend the whole world just to keep his friend safe, protect him from all the evils he had failed to safe himself from.

“Dream,” Karl asked quietly from somewhere beside him, carefully as not to startled him. He hummed, shifting into a more comfortable position and draping his arm over Sapnap’s shoulder who was curled into his side. “Has this ever happened before?”

He was hesitant at first but the way Sapnap clung to his chest, whole body still trammeling with apologies made his tongue loose.

“Yes,” he said finally, clearing his throat to get rid of the hoarseness and rasp lacing his voice. “Did it happen while you were here?”

“Y-yes.” He expected them to laugh, to scoff or be annoyed at him for being such an inconvenient but instead, Sapnap’s grip on him tightened and more apologies were whispered into the air. Dream’s face contorted into a grimace. It was such a waste of breath, he wasn’t worth any apologies.

Karl let out a long sigh and Dream tensed up knowing that he couldn’t outrun the inevitable any longer.

“So,” Karl started. “The letter.”

They were waiting for him to continue. A thick tension surrounded them, pushing down on his airways and making it hard to breathe.

There was shame, somewhere deeply buried between fear and regret. Shame that Sapnap had found the letter, that the one secret he’d kept carefully close to his heart – hidden from everyone, even Techno – had forcefully been brought to light, bare and visible for all his friends to see.

It made him feel vulnerable and all he wanted to do was cruel up and hide between the sheets of his bed, burn the letter and with it, the words messily written on the crinkled paper. It was a secret that shouldn’t have never been revealed. He felt naked, exposed under the tense gazes of his friends. There was so much concern, so much pity swirling in their eyes and he hated it.

They were waiting, expecting him to say something but the words were clogging his throat, making him choke on any possible sentence he could force out over trembling lips.

He had run almost his entire life and now that he didn’t have to run anymore he didn’t know how to stop.

“Look,” he said, softly. “When I was in prison, I was in a pretty dark place – in more ways than one.” He let out a dry chuckle, trying to ease the anxiety in his shoulders. “And yes, I did think about... that. Multiple times. Was kinda hard not to think about after a while. And before anyone asks, yes sometimes I still think about it. And I can’t promise you I will stop doing that because it’s not that easy – thoughts like that don’t just vanish but I can promise you that I won’t actually...do anything.”

He was stuttering, stumbling over his words but it was the best he could do without his voice completely breaking. It had to be enough. A sloppy promise, a halfhearted explanation, but for once he was telling the truth, revealing more about himself than he had done in a very long time. And it felt surprisingly good, light upon his shoulders and tugging soothingly at his heart.

It was a step forward, he decided. A step towards a direction he wasn’t completely sure of and couldn’t really see yet, but he knew that Karl and Sapnap and George were there next to him, guiding him along the right path. He was far away from spilling the whole truth, from telling them about every scar caved into his skin, but it was a start.

“We want to help you, Dream,” George said truthfully. “But we can’t do that if you don’t let us in.”

For split second he thought about telling them, about spilling the rest of his secrets, letting everything out. But he was tired of the looks of pity and worry on their faces. He desperately wanted back his life, how it used to be before everything came crashing down on him.

“I know,” Dream stated, locking eyes with George, then Karl and then Sapnap. “But...can we maybe forget about it for a while? I just want normality back, even if it’s just a little. I’m just...I’m not ready to talk just yet.” *I’m not ready to lose this – whatever this is.*

For a moment, Sapnap hesitated, brows knitted together and eyes narrowed but Dream’s gaze bore into him, silently begging him to just give in, to allow him the ghostly illusion of normality. In the end, Sapnap carved in, teeth chewing on the inside of his cheek before giving Dream a weak smile, “Take your time, Dream. But if you ever want to talk about, we’ll be here and we will listen, I promise.”

Dream only nodded, letting out a deep sigh of relief.

Maybe one day.

Chapter End Notes

Reading through the comments of the last chapter was kinda amusing, ngl. But don’t worry. For the sake of my own mental health, I will not let this fanfic end on a bad note, I promise. (That doesn't mean I won't make Dream suffer a bit more tho...)
Make sure to take care of yourself and go drink some water if you haven't already.
Love you guys, no matter if you leave kudos, comments or just silently read through this fanfic. I appreciate all of it <3

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Dream just wants normality back. The Dream Team goes mining - it does not end well.

TW: blood, self-destructive behavior and thoughts (thoughts of self-harm), vomiting

Chapter Notes

It's like in the middle of the night for me but i can't sleep bc my stomach hurts (its fine, somehow Tommy, Wilbur and Ranboo decided to all go live today so at least i have streams to distract me from the pain lmao) but i thought why not just upload the next chapter a bit earlier
Enjoy guys ;)

“Catch!”

“What- Ouch! What the fuck, Dream!”

A loud wheeze echoed through the mineshaft and bounced off the tunnel walls as Sapnap leaned down to get a grip on the pickaxe that had clattered down to the ground after so gracefully colliding with his side. Grumbling, he straightened his posture and massaged his aching shoulder.

Next to him, George interrupted digging into the stone wall in favor of laughing at his pain. “Aww, is little Sappy Nappy hurt? Want me to kiss it better?”

Dramatically crying out, Sapnap let his body drop on top of George who let out a surprise yelp. “Yes, Gogy! My little meow meow~ Gimme kisses!”

“Ew no. Gross.”

“Dream, George is mean to me again,” Sapnap whined. “Tell him to stop.”

Dream snickered, “It’s okay, Sappy. C’mere, I’ll give you all the kisses you want.”

Cheering, Sapnap let go of George and threw himself into Dream’s open arms, making atrocious kissing noises. George grimaced, scrunching up his nose. “You guys are disgusting.”

“Are you homophobic, George?” Dream gasped, gripping his chest in mock offense.

“Wha- no, what?”

“You know what they say about homophobes,” Sapnap quipped in from the side, grinning.

“They’re like, super gay.”

“I’m- whatever, can we just focus on what we are here for in the first place?” George pouted. “We

promised Karl to be back by sunset.”

Dream nodded, still chuckling under his breath as he let Sapnap go and picked up his pickaxe to continue mining into the wall to his left.

They’d been going at it for a few hours now, exploring caves and looking through mineshafts, searching for diamonds and iron to restock their resources. Dream’s muscles were burning from the strain and labor, tired limbs screaming for a break but at the same time he felt good. Despite sweat making his hair stick to his forehead and arms feeling exhausted to the point where every little movement ached, Dream didn’t want to stop. After so many months spent in prison, weak and frail, it felt great to feel the strength surging through his veins again, seeing the stone crumble away under the power of his blows.

He was no longer the weak and the pathetic man that had cried and begged under the blade of Quackity’s sword, no longer the man writhing on the cold ground of his small cell, helpless and defenseless.

He felt like himself again, if only a little.

It’d been two weeks since Sapnap had found the letter in his room and no one had mentioned it since. It was like a silent agreement between them, a mutual understanding that Dream would only shut down even more if they tried to talk about it.

Still, Dream could feel the eyes on him every time he wasn’t looking, the whispers behind his back and the tension in the air. They were waiting and Dream didn’t know if he could fulfill what they expected from him. Despite what he said about opening up when he was ready, he didn’t think he would ever be able to; not if his stomach turned and heart beat faster the moment he thought about telling them everything. Every time the words lay on his tongue, ready to be spoken, his mouth filled with the taste of coppery blood and his nose clogged with the smell of burning skin.

And even if he was able to get the words out, he didn’t think he could handle the reaction of his friends.

He longed for nothing more than for things to go back to how they used to, although he knew that it was far too late for that.

Wiping away the sweat from his face, he pulled his pickaxe back to break out a piece of lapis lazuli from the ceiling. It was tempting to just roll up his hoodie’s sleeves and feel the cool air of the cave, but he held back.

“Dude, how have you not gotten a heat stroke yet?” Sapnap raised his brow at Dream’s obvious discomfort. Not looking up from his work, Dream shrugged. This was really not the time to talk about his secrets and insecurities.

Before Sapnap could speak up again, they were interrupted by George who had wandered further down the mineshaft. “Hey guys! Come check this out! I think there’s another cave over here or something.”

Stashing away their tools, Sapnap and Dream caught up to their friend. George was standing in front of a wall that spotted a small hole in the middle. Dream stepped closer to the crack, trying to see what was on the other side but the darkness that lay behind the wall made it impossible.

“Get back, I wanna see what’s behind,” he said, swinging his pickaxe around before letting it collide with the wall. It didn’t take long for him to open up the hole wide enough to step through.

Covered in dust and small rocks, he forced himself through the small opening.

“What is it? Another mineshaft? A cave?”

He could hear George shuffle through after him. Squinting into the dark, he called back, “I don’t know. Does anyone have a torch?”

“Yeah I have-” A low hiss to their right cut George off mid-sentence.

Cursing under his breath, Dream wiped around just in time to see a large shadow leap at him before he was knocked over. His pickaxe clattered to the ground, lost in the dark somewhere to his left.

“Shit,” he muttered, trying to hold off a hairy head with bare hands. He could hear the clicking of teeth above him and scratching of claws on the ground. A sticky substance dropped onto his cheek, setting his skin aflame.

A Cave Spider.

He could barely hear Sapnap scream something over the static in his ears as adrenaline flooded his his veins and heightened his senses.

A claw scratched over his arm but he hardly felt it, buckling under the heavy weight on top of him. He didn’t have any useful tools within reach, pickaxe lost to the darkness of whatever cave he had stumbled into, diamond axe strapped to his back and trapped between his body and the ground.

That, however, did not stop him from fighting back. The exhaustion from before was gone, pushed back by pure adrenaline as his fingers dug into the limbs of the spider, ripping one of its legs out from underneath it. It shrieked, collapsing on top of him and pushed him even deeper into the rough stone underneath him. He gritted his teeth when he felt the hot breath of the creature against his neck, giving one last shove and throwing the spider away from him.

There was a dull thump when the spider collapsed against a wall opposite from him but Dream didn’t pay it any attention. His focus shifted to George, his silhouette illuminated by the dim light shining through the opening they had come in from. There were three other shadows next to him, one big the other two smaller. Probably Sapnap helping fight off two new spiders.

With a groan, Dream pushed himself up from the floor. He staggered a bit when he got into an upright position. Lightheaded, he stumbled back a few steps, almost falling over something behind him. He turned around, expecting a stone sticking out of the cave floor. Instead, his hands meet the cool surface of cube-shaped object.

A spider spawner, his mind supplied. Fuck.

“Sapnap, George. We need to get out of here, *now!*” His voice was scratchy and his mind felt muddy, but he pushed through, forcing his legs to obey his mind and carry him to the opening. They needed to get out as fast as they could before even more spiders could spawn.

Pickaxe long forgotten, he ran up to the hole, trying to ignore the hisses following him all the way up to the wall.

For a split second he halted in his movements, not wanting to escape without his friends, but a hand on his back shoved him forward.

“Go!” Sapnap hissed, hand not leaving Dream’s back as he helped him push through the hole and back into their mineshaft.

Dream's legs almost gave out the second they touched ground again. But he held himself upright, watching as Sapnap followed him through the opening before pulling George through as well and slamming a rock from his inventory onto the hole, blocking it off from the mineshaft.

It was quiet for a few minutes, save the heavy breathing and gasping as the three friends tried to get enough air back into their lungs.

Sapnap was the first to speak up, "Fuck, I hate spiders."

Nodding, George pulled in one last, deep breath before looking both Dream and Sapnap over. "Did anyone get hurt?"

"Nope," Sapnap said, leaning against the wall. "What about you, Dream?"

Dream shook his head, "No, but I'm so fucking exhausted right now. Let's just head back. We already have more than enough diamonds, anyway."

The way back up was quick and easy. They packed up their things and dug into the next best wall, mining their way up to the surface. Because Dream had lost his pickaxe earlier, he had to stay back and let George and Sapnap do all the work. Usually he would have protested and demanded for one of them to give him their tool so he could do the work but for once Dream was glad for the small break. He didn't know what was wrong but he was still out of breath from earlier and his stomach was churning uncomfortably.

Legs almost collapsing, he caught himself on the wall of the tunnel. There was something wet running down his side. Frowning, he pulled up the hem of his hoodie to look underneath. He let out a small gasp when he revealed a spider bite peaking through his ripped open shirt that was dyed red from the blood pouring out of his side in steady streams.

Oh, this was bad. Really, really bad.

His pain tolerance was all different ways of fucked up from Quackity's torture sessions and that mixed with numbing adrenaline, he hadn't even noticed when the spider had bitten him earlier. But now that the adrenaline was ebbing away, the pain came crashing into him full force, flooding his nervous system and making him double over.

He had to stop himself from calling out to George and Sapnap who were still working on creating a tunnel up to the surface level. His mind was screaming at him not to let them know, to just get up and ignore the blood slowly soaking through his clothes.

They'll think you're a burden. They'll leave you behind. Don't expect them to help you. No one would ever want to help you voluntarily.

But Techno, he wanted to cry out, wanted to silence the voices in his head, Techno helped me. He wanted me.

Only because you manipulated him into thinking he owed you.

Biting back a whine, he got up on shaky legs, stubbornly ignoring the wave of vertigo that made his world tilt around. The poison from the spider bite was now rushing through his body full force, tremors were wrecking his whole form and his vision was going in and out of focus. He swallowed, tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth as he focused all his attention on taking one step at a time.

It wasn't like the pain was foreign to him and a part of him felt satisfied in a sick, twisted sort of way – wanted him to dig the palms of his hands harsh against the wound and make the blood flow

faster, wanted to chase after the feeling. It had been a while since he felt agony scorching his veins and it felt good, so familiar. But he couldn't break in to the urge, had to force himself to swallow down the pain and make his legs push forward; he couldn't risk George and Sapnap finding out.

He let out a sigh of relief when George finally broke through the surface, warm daylight streaming through the crack in the ceiling. Dragging his body out of the ground took him more effort than it should've, limbs aching and freezing despite the sun warming up the air around him.

They had dug up in the middle of the forest right next to Kinoko Kingdom which meant that it wouldn't take long to get back home where Dream could hopefully lock himself into his room and relish in the pain, curl up next to Patches and sleep off the poison, act like nothing happened in the morning.

But for that to happen, he had to get his legs to work first.

His vision whitened out for a second or two and when he came to again, he was sitting on the forest floor, Sapnap and George already further ahead, not having noticed Dream falling behind.

It was fine, Dream reassured himself, pushing back up. He didn't want them to notice anyway. It was a good thing.

He was stumbling now, barely upright. Choking back the lump in his throat, he almost fell over a stone lying on the ground. He managed to catch himself last minute, hands painfully scratching across the bark of a tree. His breath was rigid, shallow. He desperately tried not to think about how familiar the feeling of blood running down his skin was but his mind was hazy, fogged over and he could feel himself slip again.

"Dream?" Suddenly, Sapnap was in front of him, gripping his shoulder and distantly Dream thought he probably would have fallen if it wasn't for the stabilizing hand. "Dude, you okay? You look like, really pale."

If Dream had enough air left in his lungs, he would've laughed but the moment he opened his mouth his stomach flipped and he could barely turn his body away from Sapnap before he was back on the ground, knees uncomfortably dragging across sticks and rocks and body convulsing to get his last meal back out.

"Fuck," he could hear George say somewhere behind him.

Yeah, Dream thought. Fuck.

His throat was burning and tears were streaming down his cheeks by the time he leaned back. There were hands on his back, drawing patterns in the fabric of his hoodie and fingers in his hair, pushing back the strands that were sticking to his forehead, massaging his pounding head.

He felt like a little child again, curled up next to the toilet while Bad was hugging him, comforting him and guiding him through his sickness. He wasn't one to get sick often but when he did, he crashed hard.

There were voices speaking over his head but he barely had the energy nor the ability to concentrate on more than the stabbing pain in his side and the flaming poison filling his veins, taking him apart from the inside out.

"Dream, can you hear me?"

"Shit, he's completely out of it-"

“Hey Dreamie, can you open your pretty eyes for us?” When did he close his eyes? He tried to pry them back open but his eyelids felt heavy and his bones were exhausted.

“What is wrong with him?”

“I don’t know!” The voices were getting more frantic with each second that ticked by and something inside Dream stirred to life. His friends were panicking, something wasn’t right. Were they hurt? He had to help them.

Abruptly, he stood up, eyes ripped wide open, “Sap, Georgie. Need to help,” he slurred, vision blurry and unfocused.

“Woah, Dream. Calm down, we’re right here.”

“Pandas?” He wanted to say more, ask if Sapnap or George were alright, but his tongue wouldn’t move, heavy in his mouth and a new wave of vertigo hit him. Blindly, he stretched his hands out hoping for Sapnap to understand what he wanted. And of course he did. Their friendship was built on blind trust, on knowing what the other was thinking even without words being passed.

Sapnap’s hands found his, stabilizing him before his face could hit dirt again. The poison had reached his heart by now, making his body convulse and twitch and agony spread under his skin. Cave spiders weren’t as bad as the blade of a wither skeleton, Dream knew that from experience, but it still hurt like a bitch. His mind was screaming at him to just close his eyes again and let unconsciousness drag him under but he stubbornly held on. He needed to make sure his friends were okay. And so he willed the darkness away, blinked the black spots out of his vision and concentrated his entire energy on the two silhouettes in front of him.

“You ‘kay?”

There was a moment of silence and for a second Dream thought they hadn’t understood him but before he could try again, George spoke up, voice laced with confusion. “Are we okay? Dream, *you* are the one hurt.”

He was? Oh, right. The cave spider.

He let out a low whine, almost like an animal. Usually he would have been terrified and embarrassed for showing his pain but everything felt too hot and too cold at the same time and his body didn’t wanna obey him any longer, legs buckling. If it wasn’t for Sapnap he wouldn’t be standing upright anymore. “Hurts.”

“We know,” mumbled Sapnap. He sounded scared, worried, and Dream hated himself for being the cause for his concern. “Can you tell us where it hurts?”

“Side,” he managed to press out over numb lips. There was shuffling besides him. Someone peeled his hoodie and shirt away from his skin and he winced when the cool forest air hit his bare stomach, cooling off the blood running down his hip.

“Shit, Sapnap look.”

It was the last thing he heard before the world around him started spinning, an explosion of green and brown and blue before he collapse against something solid.

After that, there was only darkness and the sweet numbness of unconsciousness.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Karl, Sapnap and George treat Dream's injury.

TW: blood, hinting at torture (scars), slight mentioning of vomiting

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The day had been going great – until it wasn't.

They had already been on their way back, George having wrapped Sapnap into a conversation about the best way to hunt down a deer, when they'd realized that Dream was lacking behind. It wasn't anything unusual nowadays. Dream liked to get caught up in his head a lot, often trailing a bit farther ahead or behind when they went outside. But when they had turned around, Dream had been barely standing upright, eyes half-way rolled into his head.

He threw up not even a minute after they managed to reach him, bile and something that looked suspiciously like blood straining the forest floor and Sapnap and George could do nothing but watch as Dream's body weakly convulsed against Sapnap's arms.

Trying to escape the cobwebs of panic, Sapnap desperately searched through his memories in an attempt to find out why the fuck Dream was collapsed against his chest, almost completely limp save for the tremors rippling through his body.

All his thoughts came to a still stand when George pulled away the layers of clothes from Dream's skin, revealing an angry looking bite wound at his side. "Shit, Sapnap look-"

The flesh around his side was torn up and red, black veins stretched across Dream's stomach, creeping up to his heart and blood was steadily seeping out of the open wound. It was a spider bite. Sapnap grimaced, pulling Dream's body into a new position to support his dead weight better. It was just in time for him to see Dream's eyes roll up and head fall forward against his shoulder.

"Fuck," he cursed, not even attempting to keep the worry out of his voice. Normally, getting hurt while mining was annoying but it wasn't life threatening. And if Sapnap didn't know for a fact that they were out of health potions, he probably wouldn't be all too concerned. But now he had to push away the panic raising in his throat. He turned to George, eyes meeting his, reflecting the same fear back to him. "We need to get him back to Kinoko Kingdom. Now!"

They each took one of Dream's arms, throwing it over their shoulders, both supporting half of Dream's weight. Getting him back to Kinoko turned out to be a very difficult task. Dream's chin had fallen onto his chest and Sapnap was fairly certain that the blonde had finally passed out – at least he hoped so, the poison of a cave spider was very painful and unconsciousness meant at least a little bit of mercy – but his body wouldn't stop seizing up, throwing all three of them out of balance every other step, making them nearly trip multiple times.

Sapnap was still in shock, confused and hurt and angry at Dream for not telling him and George

about his injury sooner, making them find about it like *this*.

He knew Dream had problems with admitting that he needed help, he'd always been like this, but he'd hoped that the incidents with the letter had made at least something click in Dream's head. That it made him realize that they were there for him, ready to help and care for him if he just let them.

They reached Kinoko in under fifteen minutes, startling a murder of crows that had settled down in the center of the Kingdom, but they didn't pay the black birds any mind, too worried about Dream. He was still twitching between them, violently shaking from the waves of poison running through his system.

Karl barely wasted any time when they came stumbling into the kitchen, bolting up from his chair and immediately clearing the dinner table from a few stray papers and a hunting knife before pointing to the free surface, indicating for Sapnap and George to lay Dream onto it.

They were completely out of breath by the time they had managed to pull Dream onto the table and for a moment, Sapnap had to take a step back and bring his hand up to his chest, feeling his heart rapidly beating against his rib cage. He tried not to think about the blood of his best friend coating his fingers, or his stomach churning with unease.

While George and Sapnap had heaved Dream onto the table, Karl had gone and washed his hands, collecting a few useful materials on his way back. His face was scrunched up in that calculated expression he always wore when someone had gotten injured, mind shifting into the mindset of a healer.

"We need to get his clothes off first," he said, firmly.

Glad that finally someone was in control who knew what to do, how to help Dream, Sapnap moved forward, hastily following Karl's orders. They ended up cutting off the fabric of Dream's hoodie and shirt. It was much easier and that way they didn't need to jostle Dream more than the poison was already doing.

Sapnap didn't know what he'd expected, but he couldn't stop the gasp from leaving his mouth when his eyes met the bare skin of Dream's chest.

Dream had always had scars, even as a child – hell, they *all* had scars. It was something inevitable when living in a land tainted by wars and bloodshed. But he didn't remember Dream ever having this many scars. They were everywhere, some tearing deeply into Dream's flesh while others were only ghosts on pale skin. There was the aftermath of flames on his bicep, jagged lines of a knife across his collarbones and a long stripe from his abdomen up to his chest, and so, so many more. There was barely any skin left untouched from the gruesome scar tissue.

George was the first to wake up from his stupor, dashing around the kitchen island to get to the sink before emptying the contents of his stomach, knuckles turning white from the sheer force he used to grip onto the sides of the kitchen counter. Sapnap almost joined him, barely being able to swallow down the nausea himself.

"Is that why he—" he started before stopping, hands flying up to his mouth. Was this why Dream had refused to tell them about what had happened in prison? Because he... had he been tortured?

"We don't have time for that right now." Karl said, tone confident. He sounded like he wasn't affected by the revelation, but Sapnap knew his fiancé, catching the slight shake in his hands as he lifted them to move Dream's arm away from his side to expose his wound to the room.

A particularly vigorous tremor made Dream's back arch and Sapnap finally teared his eyes away from the scarred flesh. George joined him at Dream's side again, gripping the blond's hand and squeezing it tightly. Sapnap gave him a weak smile.

A pained whimper made their heads whip around. Sapnap's eyes widened. "Is he still awake?"

Leaning over, Sapnap was met with half-lidded eyes, glossed over with agony that was still ripping through Dream's body. How the fuck was he still awake?

Dream drew out a pained moan, sluggishly rolling his head to the side. He was barely holding onto consciousness, Sapnap realized and he had to hold himself back from slapping a man that was already down. This stubborn motherfucker must be in so much pain, but refused to let go and pass out already.

Sapnap gritted his teeth, one hand coming up to cup Dream's cheek, turning his head away from Karl and trying to distract him from the wet cloth Karl was carefully pressing against the open wound on his side to clear it from any dirt. Still, Dream flinched away, eyes widening for a second before falling back to the half-open position. He looked delirious, red splotches covering his cheeks and mouth moving without any words coming out. Single strands of his hair were sticking to his face because of the sweat that had gathered along his forehead and George pressed into Sapnap's side to wipe Dream's hair out of his eyes.

Another groan stumbled over chapped lips and George threw Sapnap a worried glance. "Are you sure we don't have any healing potions?"

"No," Karl answered, sternly. He was finished with cleaning the wound, weighing up his options as he stared down at the gaping hole in Dream's side. Now that the dirt and blood wasn't blocking the view any longer, he could see the full expansion of the injury. "I need to stitch it."

"What," Sapnap bristled. "But he's still conscious! He'll feel everything!"

Karl bit his lip, eyebrows drawn together. "I know, Sap. But he will bleed out if I don't."

Sapnap looked back down at Dream who's face was scrunched up in pain, body twitching every few seconds when the poison welled up again and eyes blindly darting around the room. Sapnap doubted he knew where he was, his world probably only having enough space for agony at the moment. Gods, why couldn't this idiot just pass out already, like any normal, sane person would.

To his left, George suddenly gasped before letting go of Dream's hand and leaving the kitchen. Dream's frown deepened, fingers clenching around air without George's hand and he whined from the back of his throat. Sapnap could do nothing but shush Dream, gently running his own hand through his hair while Karl was remorsefully disinfecting the tools he needed to stitch Dream back together.

Karl was about to dig the needle into flesh, when George came bursting back into the room, Patches placed on his shoulder while solemnly holding an object above his head. Sapnap's brow shot up, "Is that a-"

"A weakness potion," George confirmed, moving back to his previous spot beside Dream's hip on the opposite side of Karl. Patches jumped down onto the table, warily sniffing at Dream's arm before hissing and settling down next to her owners head, her own small head rubbing against his ear in an attempt to sooth the convulsions. "If Dream is too stubborn to pass out, then we'll have to force him."

Looking over to Karl, who had pulled back the needle for a moment, George searched for an affirmation to carry out his plan. When he got the insurance he needed in form of a nod, George swiftly uncorked the weakness poison, pressing the cool glass of the bottle up to Dream's lips.

Hazy panic filled Dream's eyes as he started to thrash, mind too far gone to understand that they didn't mean any harm. Sapnap's hand came up to his chin to hold him in place and help George to force the bottle passed his lips, cringing when Dream fought even harder against their helping hands. For someone on the brink of blacking out, Dream was oddly strong, muscles straining to push up against George and Sapnap.

Karl cursed when blood started to well up again, body leaning onto Dream's to press him back onto the hard surface of the table, pinning his chest down. "George, hurry up!"

"I'm trying," George said through gritted teeth, tilting the potion up so that the contents could flow down into Dream's mouth. A few droplets spilled over, the lilac blue substance running across Dream's chin, down to his throat but George managed to get the majority of the bottle into Dream.

It took 10 seconds for the potion to take over Dream's bloodstream, fatigue spreading through his limbs and weighing him down.

Sapnap was close enough to his lips to hear the faint "*Please no*" slip out of Dream's lips and he swallowed thickly, relieved that Dream didn't have to suffer any longer. Dream's eyes finally rolled into the back of his head for a second time that day and he collapsed bonelessly against the table. Even with his friend finally unconscious and free from the pain, Sapnap couldn't shake off the feeling of guilt for having to force Dream into resting in such a harsh way.

On the opposite side of the table, Karl let out a relieved sigh, grasping for the wash cloth again to wipe away the blood. The poison in Dream's veins had leveled off, his body only twitching every other minute, tension slowly seeping out of his cramped up muscles and eyes closed.

Sapnap's head shot up when someone gently shook his shoulder, eyes flying open to meet Karl's.

"He's gonna be okay."

Sapnap drowsily stretched out his limbs before adjusting his slumped over position on the kitchen chair he must've fallen asleep on when Karl had started stitching up Dream's wound. He glanced over to the table where the injured man was still lying on. One arm had fallen off the side of the surface and hanging freely in the air. George was standing next to him, gently washing away the dried blood around the bandages that had been tightly wrapped around Dream's stomach. He looked exhausted but his face was drawn into a thoughtful expression.

He looked up when he heard Sapnap and Karl come closer. "Why didn't he tell us?"

He didn't need to specify, all eyes immediately darting back down to Dream's chest that was steadily raising and falling. It calmed down Sapnap's nerves a little bit, the knowledge that Dream was still breathing, still alive. *He's okay.*

Except he wasn't.

It made sense now; why Dream always made sure to never take off any clothes around them, why he flinched away from touches and loud noises, why his sleep was filled with nightmares. For whatever reason, Dream hadn't told them but now, in a vertiginous swirl of unfortunate events, his silence had come crashing down, secrets bared for all of them to see.

Sapnap looked down at what he assumed were the scars left behind by the teeth of a whip covering Dream's rib cage, running all the way around to his back. It was enough to make the nausea flare back up again and he had to take deep breaths through his nose to get his stomach back under control.

"Who did this to him?" They weren't stupid. They'd known something horrible must've happened to Dream in prison, already knowing about Sam forbidding him to talk and eat – which was already be bad enough.

But gods, this was so much worse.

Sympathy, worry, shock and terror mixed together in a weird, twisted combination that made Sapnap's head spin and heart clench painfully.

"Was it-" He swallowed, trying to get rid of the acid burning the back of his throat. "Was it Sam?"

"We'll confront him." There was no room left for arguing as Karl collected his medical tools from the table. His face had fallen into an unreadable expression. "Once Dream is doing a bit better, we will give Sam a visit and I swear to the Prime Gods, if he refuses to tell us anything then it will not end well for him."

George's eyes fluttered open, mind still hazy with sleep. He didn't know what had woken him, groggily pushing his body into an upright position to find the cause of his abrupt awakening. It took his brain a second to recognize his surroundings and remember why he was here, still partially stuck in his dreams.

Dream's room was encased in complete darkness, the shine of the moon in front of his window not bright enough to penetrate the thickness of the night. After they had carried Dream into his bed, George had volunteered to stay in case Dream woke up and needed something. He must've fallen asleep, neck aching from the awkward position, half lying down, half leaning against the bed frame.

A loud sound next to his ear startled George completely out of the drowsy state, head snapping around to find a pair of green eyes watching him. He let out a relieved sigh, hands reaching out to pat through soft fur. "Hey, Patches."

The feline meowed again and George frowned. Normally, Patches was calm and quiet, only using her voice when she needed something urgently. "What's wrong? Why did you wake me?"

Patches let out a high pitched whine, nervously shuffling around on the mattress before taking a leap and jumping over George's body onto the other side of the bed. George's eyes immediately narrowed down to Dream who was sleeping on his side, facing away from him.

"Dream?" George whispered into the darkness, knowing he wouldn't get an answer. Carefully, he put a hand on the other man's shoulder to turn him around. Patches let out another mewl when her owner was rolled onto his back, face limply lolling to the left. He was pale, that was the first thing George noticed, but his cheeks were flushed, eyes squeezed shut as if he was in pain, little wheezes and gasps escaping his lips.

Drawing his brows together, George's fingertips brushed over Dream's forehead. His heart sunk

when he felt the heat radiating from his skin. "Fuck."

Chapter End Notes

Yayy we've finally reached the "infection" and "Sick Dream" tag. Took me long enough lmao. Hope you guys liked the chapter.

Also, omfg almost 1k kudos and 1,5k hits? I'm gonna cry. This means so much to me and it gives me so much motivation to keep on writing. I know I say this a lot but really, thank you so much <3

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Dream's wound is infected.

TW: Mentioning of torture and abuse, self-destructive thoughts, vomiting

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late upload. I wanted to take a small break from this fanfic yesterday. While doing so I wrote another fanfic - it's not a long one, just like a bit over 6k words and it's Dream-centric with angst, hurt/comfort and fluff. Might upload it once my beta reader is through with it.

Anygaw, here's the chapter from George's pov that anita requested in chapter 5. Enjoy :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream was both burning up and shivering under his touch and George had to bite his lip and will away the panic that started to infest his brain.

Now was not the right time. Panic would only make things worse.

He didn't want to leave the sick man's side, so he called out to Karl and Sapnap, hoping that his voice would carry all the way up to their shared bedroom despite its shakiness, and turned back around to where Dream was restlessly shifting on the mattress.

The bandages on his side were too thick to see underneath but George already knew what he would find, reddened and swollen skin – which wouldn't be unusual for a healing wound but the fever racking through Dream's defenseless body betrayed the true cause of the irritated skin.

He called out for his friends again when they didn't turn up, slowly starting to lose himself in the panic he could no longer push down. Next to him, Dream let out a whimper; it sounded weak and confused and George almost doubled over from the way his heart clenched. He couldn't do much without leaving Dream's side, only run his fingers through sweaty hair and hope that Karl and Sapnap would wake up soon.

Dream turned to his side, eyes squeezed shut and face twisted in a frown that took roots in the discomfort caused by the fever and pain stretching through his body. He mumbled something under his breath, too incoherent for George to understand, and whined again. George tried his best to soothe his sick lover, hands scratching across his scalp in what he hoped would give him at least somewhat solace in the muddled fever haze he was experiencing.

Next to him, Patches restlessly wandered around the mattress, looking at George pleadingly but he could only shake his head in helpless and desperate surrender.

Dream muttered something again. This time it was loud enough for George to catch it, albeit he had to strain his ears to make sense of the slurred together syllables and words, “Pl’s e, Sam. Help me- Don’t let him in- ‘Can’t anymore.” He was starting to move more, limbs that weren’t completely under his control twisted in the sheets, head frantically turning from one side to another.

“He will kill me, Sam. Please!” He was getting louder, voice raising in a high pitched twist of pure horror. George didn’t know what to do, besides gripping Dream’s arms, tight enough to keep him from trashing too much and ripping open his stitches again but not enough to feel like restrictions. He had seen the rope-like burn marks on Dream’s wrists and didn’t want to accidentally set off another horrifying flashback.

They had held him down, with ropes rubbing his wrists raw and collar biting into his throat.

George didn’t want to think about it when the sheer thought made his stomach twist and bile rise up, but it was hard not to when the scars were right there. And George was tired of pretending that everything way okay – it wasn’t fair, not to him, not to Dream.

Back when Dream was still in Pandora’s Vault and George visited the prison almost everyday (he would never step inside, only lurking around the walls of the obsidian box like a ghost haunting the doom of their life – and maybe, in a way, the prison was exactly that) he used to step close to the walls of the prison, laying his hand on the rough stone and reaching out to the connection he had to the server, forcing veins and wild flowers to spread over what was not supposed to be a place for nature to grow over.

The next day he visited, the plants would be wilted and withered away for the obsidian could not give them the source of life they needed to survive. But that didn’t stop George from calling out to the server again and again and again. Every day he would give the prison life only to see it die away before his eyes.

Maybe it had been his way of soothing his own conscience, or maybe he had just desperately tried to embellish the ugly truth, an attempt to create the delusion that everything way okay when it obviously wasn’t.

But now, he was done with denying the past, for Dream’s sake.

Underneath him, Dream was getting more agitated with each passing second and his friends still weren’t here. “You can stop him, Sam!” He yelled hysterically, pushing against George’s helping hands. “Why are you just- Why do you stand there? Why do you watch? He’ll kill me! One day he’ll kill me and I don’t want to die! Please, please, please-“

George tried not to think about what these words meant (because if he was talking to Sam about a someone torturing him, then that meant that Sam *knew* but wasn’t the one executing the horrible act himself, or at least, not alone). He ignored it for now in favor of screaming for his friends a third time, his voice piercing the heavy silence that filled the house. He didn’t have time for more confusion and anxiety; he could deal with the consequences of Dream’s accidental confession later, when Dream wasn’t running a dangerously high fever anymore, when he had a calm moment to himself where he didn’t have to worry for his friend’s life.

He wasn’t the one with the infection but he still felt sick.

Dream muttered a few more panicked sentences – too slurred and jumbled together for George to understand – before he calmed down again, body bonelessly falling back onto the mattress. George let a few seconds pass, making sure Dream wouldn’t start throwing himself around again. When he

stayed still, George carefully let go of his arms, exhaling through his nose to let his rapidly beating heart settle down.

He let out a sigh of endless relief when Karl and Sapnap finally came busting into Dream's room, although still a little drowsy from being so abruptly woken up. They stood in the door frame for a moment, blinking away the sleep and taking in the situation. Karl was the first to move, eyes catching onto Dream's flushed and sweaty skin before George could stutter out a partially coherent explanation. He doubted he would have been able to get any words out anyway, hands shaking from what he believed was a mixture of helpless distress and shock of what Dream's delirious mumbling had just revealed to him.

The light was flickered on and Karl was next to him in a second, hand pressed against Dream's forehead and George could see his face twist apologetically when he had to take it away again, Dream whining and head chasing after the soothing coldness of Karl's palm.

"It was to be expected if I'm being honest. It's a spider bite – these wounds tend to get infected much faster and more often – and we didn't even have any healing potions here," Karl said, brows pinched together in a calculated concentration. George caught the flash of worry in his eyes before Karl managed to tuck it away, slipping back into the apathetic role of the healer.

"Sapnap, go get some cold washcloths, please. We need to bring the fever down." Sapnap didn't waste a second, immediately bolting towards the bathroom, happy to have something to do that would help Dream. Karl, turned to George, continuing. "I'll go get a few things so I can clean the wound again. Stay with him and make sure he doesn't get worse. If something happens, scream."

With that, he was gone and George was yet again alone with Dream. Well, almost alone.

Patches had jumped out of the way when Dream had started trashing around earlier. Now, that the commotion was over, she hopped onto George's shoulder, rubbing against George's cheek.

"I know," he said, voice strained. "But he's going to be okay. He's strong."

Was he though? He used to be, before the prison, stubborn and powerful, letting nothing get in the way of him. He liked to believe Dream was still strong but then he would look into his eyes and see the haze of utter defeat and exhaustion.

But he was still here, wasn't he? Despite everything, he was still alive, still breathing and George didn't he think he would've been able to pull through if he had been in Dream's place.

Dream was strong, stronger than George could ever be.

Sighing, he leaned down and pressed a kiss on his lover's forehead, running a hand through tangled strands.

He was strong. He would be okay.

Dream had started murmuring and twisting around again by the time Sapnap was back and the younger threw George a worried glance, stepping up next to the bed and gently laying a wet washcloth onto Dream's forehead. The effect was immediate. Dream sighed through parted lips, the creases on his face slightly relaxing as the coolness seeped into his skin and took a little bit of the discomfort away.

He looked small, tangled up in the sheets, face flushed and eyes shut tight and George hated it because Dream wasn't supposed to look small. He was a warrior, a fighter, someone who got back up the second he fell down.

“He can’t catch a break, can he?” George looked up at Sapnap who was staring at Dream, jaw tense and fingers fidgeting at his side. “Why didn’t he-” his voice faltered. “He didn’t tell us he was injured. He still doesn’t trust us to help him.”

George had never been good with emotions; they were messy and complicated but seeing Sapnap stand in the middle of the room, looking so lost, he couldn’t help but open his arms, “Come here, idiot.” He didn’t even remember the last time they hugged. It must have been sometime before the election and that thought was almost enough to make his heart turn into ice.

It seemed like Sapnap had missed their hugs as much as him. The moment his arms widened in a stance of hopeful proposition, Sapnap leaped forward, pressing his face into his shoulder and fingers against the soft fabric of his hoodie.

“Once Dream’s doing better we will all sit down and talk, properly for once.” George felt Sapnap nod against his shoulder, hug tightening. They stayed like this for a while, only broke apart when Karl came back but even then they stayed close, shoulders pressed together, chasing after the warmth and comfort of the other.

“Sorry it took so long,” Karl rushed, sitting down on the bed where George had been a few minutes earlier. “Because we don’t have any potions, we have to resort to old healing methods. There are a few wild plants growing next to the dragon statue outside. One of them should help bring the fever down if I remember correctly,” then, under his breath, Karl added, “At least I hope so, otherwise we’ll have a problem.”

He emptied his hands, putting a bowl of what seemed to be soup on the nightstand together with a bundle of mashed herbals, before turning to Dream who had curled up in a tight ball, face pulled in a pained frown. The cool cloth had slipped down onto the pillow from the shift in position and Karl carefully took it and placed it back onto his forehead.

“Dreamie, I need you to wake up for a second,” murmured Karl, softly. Dream groaned, tilting his head towards Karl’s voice. “You can go back to sleep when I’m done. It won’t take long, I promise.”

Glassy, green eyes fluttered open. For a moment, Dream’s gaze flickered around the room, not really focusing on anything specific before finding Karl. He furrowed his brow, seemingly trying to make sense of the world around him despite the fever fog clogging his brain. “K’rl?”

“Yes, it’s me. Can you tell me how you’re feeling?”

There was a pause, before Dream opened his mouth again. His movements were sluggish and uncoordinated as he tried to shift into a more comfortable position. “Hurts,” he slurred. “Hurts, but it’s good.”

Karl was turned away from him but George could see his back tense up at Dream’s word. “What do you mean by that?”

“Feels good. Everything’s been so confusing lately. But I know this, this is familiar. I like it.”

Next to George, Sapnap’s hand found his, squeezing it tight and George had to avert his eyes from where they had laid on Dream, clamping his jaw shut to fight a wave of nausea. It was clear that Dream wasn’t fully aware of his surroundings and his words, fever making his tongue loose, but he had sounded so sincere and George feared that there lay a certain truth in Dream’s incoherent mumbling. One more thing they needed to talk about.

Karl cleared his throat, “Do you think you are able to eat or drink something? I made soup for you.”

Hesitantly, Dream nodded, blindly reaching out his hands. Karl hummed, taking the bowl from the nightstand. Dream’s hands were still shaky and after a few seconds of struggling and clumsily spilling some of the soup, Karl gently took the spoon from his fingers, guiding it up to Dream’s lips. “Here, I got you, honey.”

“You are never this nice to me, Karl. That’s so unfair,” Sapnap huffed, teasingly.

George couldn’t help the smile that ghosted over his lips, thankful for Sapnap’s ability to lighten the mood and soften the tension no matter what. It made the situation more bearable, if only a little bit.

“Aw, is my baby jealous,” Karl giggled, rolling his eyes when he caught Sapnap’s pout. “You’re so needy.” They went on like this for a while, Karl carefully making sure that Dream got enough food down without chocking on it while playfully bantering with Sapnap.

Their conversation was interrupted by Dream’s hoarse voice. “George?”

Surprised, George turned around, finding unfocused, half-lidded eyes already on him. Dream had pushed away the spoon, refusing any more soup as he stared at George who restlessly shifted around under the weight of his gaze.

“Dream? You okay?” George asked confused.

“What are you doing here?”

George tilted his head to the side, sitting down on the bed next to Karl to get a better look at Dream. “What do you mean, Dream?”

The blonde opened his mouth before closing it quickly, hands gripping the sheets under him tightly. “I-” he started, swallowing thickly. “You shouldn’t be here.”

Something inside George recoiled, dread pooling into his gut as he forced himself to press on, “Dream, I don’t understand-”

“You’re not supposed to be here,” Dream interrupted him. He sounded urgent, desperate. “Why are you here? Sam said he doesn’t allow any visitors anymore... What if *he* comes back? You need to go, please George.”

He had started rambling, stumbling over words and George could only sit there and listen, trying to make sense of Dream’s panicked pleas. He didn’t know what Dream was talking about and by the looks of it, neither did Karl and Sapnap who threw a concerned glance at him. He just shrugged his shoulders before focusing back on Dream.

“Dream, where are we right now?”

“The prison. My cell.” George couldn’t stop the sharp inhale. “Why are you here, George? What if he comes back and hurts you?”

George had to fight back burning guilt as he forced out the next words before he could stop himself. “Who could come back?” It felt wrong, like he was taking advantage of Dream’s fever-ridden state, but he needed to know, the question was eating away at him and he couldn’t hold back any longer. “Who is it?”

“Can’t.”

“Can’t what?”

“Tell you,” Dream’s eyes were fogged over and wide, nervously jumping around the room without meeting George’s. He looked like a small child, caught with his hand in the cookie jar. “You would hate me.”

George bit his lip, “Do I know this person?”

Hesitantly, Dream nodded. “He-” he stopped, eyes widening a tad more before he leaped up, almost crashing down to the floor if Sapnap hadn’t caught him in time. The touch made Dream jump back but he didn’t have time to process anything, hands flying up to his mouth.

“Shit, he’s gonna throw up,” Sapnap hissed, trying to be as gently as possible while still being urgent as he pushed Dream into the direction of the bathroom.

George could do nothing but follow. Dream’s words were still clinging to his mind like a broken music box, scratching over the disc and creating the most horrible melody he’d ever heard. He wanted to push further, get Dream to confess and spill his secret, but the guilt started to overwhelm him and his heart clenched painfully as he watched Dream.

The taller man fell down onto his knees and leaned over the toilet, his body shivering when his overheated skin touched the cold tiles of the bathroom floor. Karl was beside him, drawing soothing patterns across his back as he threw up what little he managed to swallow down earlier. There were tears running down his cheeks as he withered on the ground, body shaking from the retches and coughs and gasps for air.

“If his fever doesn’t go down we need to put him in an ice bath,” Karl breached the silence when Dream finally pulled away from the toilet, tiredly collapsing against the wall next to him. “For now we need to apply the herbs around the infected area and make sure he drinks enough and manages to keep the water down.” He was chewing on his lips, a nervous habit of him that told George that the infection was worse than Karl wanted to admit.

George’s gaze drifted down to Dream, taking in his disheveled appearance – his wet, blotched skin and sweat soaked hair – before making eye contact with Sapnap, finding his own worries and concerns reflected back at him. Dream really couldn’t catch a break.

It was much later – after George had sent a very worried Karl and Sapnap back to bed, hoping that at least two of them would catch a bit sleep before the morning came – that George found himself sitting on the floor right next to Dream, being so close to him but feeling so far away at the same time.

Earlier, Dream had whimpered something about the mattress being too soft for his back before letting himself fall onto the carpet. Now, he was curled up on the ground, shivers wracking through his body whilst the fever burned him up, painting crimson across his tear streaked cheeks. He was crying, albeit silently. No sobs escaped his parted lips, only small gasps and sharp inhales, eyes squeezed shut and face buried into the fur of the carpet.

And George could only sit there and watch his friend, his lover, fall apart in front of him, not being able to chase away the memories the fever brought back up. He felt helpless and stupid and useless as he sat there, letting the night pass on.

He didn't know when he started crying as well, all the conflicting emotions welling up in from of tears and so he continued to sit and cry with Dream as the time continued to run by, unbothered.

Chapter End Notes

I really hope you liked this chapter. Right now this thing is starting to happen again where no matter what, I can't tell if my work is bad or if my brain's just stupid. I'm trying my best but I'm kinda struggling right now so any kind of feedback's always welcomed <3

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Dream is still not feeling better

TW: Mentioning of torture and abuse, very slight mentioning of vomiting, self-destructive thoughts

Chapter Notes

seriously, reading through all the kind words and sweet comments to the last chapter made me almost cry. It definitely helped silencing the stupid voices in my head and chase away a great portion of the doubts. As a big thank you here already the next chapter <3

Don't forget to take care of yourself and enjoy the chapter <3

(also, please keep in mind that this fanfic is based on fiction. If you ever have a fever don't try out an ice bath because in reality it will not help break the fever at all.)

Dream didn't get better, the fever acting like a fuel to his sickness, burning him whole. They had to cuff him to the bed at some point, going against their own bleeding hearts as they pushed Dream down onto the mattress and bound his wrists with padded bonds. Despite being injured, Dream fought like an animal with so much strength that it took two of them to hold him down as he struggled in hysteric fear. It hurt George to see him like this but the fever kept his mind in a prison in more ways than one and they couldn't risk him hurting them or himself, tearing his stitches and making everything worse.

Dream drifted in and out of consciousness. When he was awake he was barely lucid, eyes open but not *seeing*. It was in moments like these that George learned.

He learned about a man named Sir and how he broke Dream's bones and flesh and mind. George could patch everything together out of slurred sentences and half screamed apologies but even then he knew that it wasn't the entire truth bared in front of him. There was still so much he didn't know about Dream's time in prison, so much the fever didn't make Dream forcefully reveal about his past – a part of George felt guilty for learning about it this way but even if he wanted to, he wouldn't be able to stop the words from leaving Dream's dry and torn lips.

So he could only sit there on Dream's bed, make sure he drank a little bit of water before he slipped back under, applying Karl's herbs on the red veined infection and hope that the would fever break soon.

At least he wasn't alone. Patches waited with him the entire time, staying at his side and pressing her soft body into his as if she wanted to give him solace and comfort. It made the time a tiny bit more bearable and George showed her his gratitude through cuddling and patting, being rewarded with soft purrs.

It was already noon when Karl turned to him, face twisted in a concentrated expression. He tried his best to keep the worry away but George could see the creases of concern etched into his face. “The fever is still not down. I think it’s time for the ice bath.”

George nervously bit around on his lip, grip tightening around Dream’s arm to keep him from falling to the side. After some consideration, they had tied a piece of their hunting gear around Dream’s side to prevent the water from getting to the stitches. Now, they were all standing in the bathroom, George and Sapnap supporting Dream’s staggering body while Karl prepared the bath.

“It’s ready now,” Karl said after a few minutes. “How do we do this?”

“I go in first.” It wasn’t a question. Determent, George stepped forward, ignoring Sapnap’s suggestive eyebrow wiggles. “You are gross, dude,” he mumbled, slowly sinking into the bath and suppressing a shiver.

Sapnap just laughed lightheartedly, despite the tense atmosphere. “This is probably the most action you got in a while,” he purred innocently while lifting Dream’s almost completely limp body over the edge of the bath. George rolled his eyes and reached his hands out to bring Dream to his chest, holding on tighter when Dream started to struggle the moment his bare skin touched the freezing water.

“Wha-” Dream’s voice was rough like obsidian stone, the sound painfully scratching against his throat and George watched as Dream’s mouth twisted into a snarl, half-lidded eyes frantically flickering through the room as he tried to fight against whatever was causing his body to tense up, muscles convulsing around the icy feeling.

George pressed his lips together, “You’re safe, Dream. Just try to relax, okay? I’m sorry for causing you so much pain right now, but we need to get your fever down.”

“N-no,” Dream whined, aching his back to get away from the cold. He was stopped by George pressing a hand against his chest, gently forcing his body back down.

“It will be quick, don’t worry,” the brunette mumbled, apologetically combing through dirty blond strands, pressing a kiss against his temple. “You will feel much better once this is over, I promise.”

Dream didn’t seem to hear him, restlessly shifting against his chest. “Where is Tech,” he slurred. “Want Tech.”

George’s heart clenched at how confused and lost he sounded, swallowing down the burning jealousy about the fact that Dream was asking for Technoblade when he was right here.

You weren’t with him when he needed you the most, his mind hissed. How can you expect him to call for you when you never answered his cries for help before.

It wasn’t fair of him, he knew that but it wasn’t enough to chase away the ugly envy he felt towards Technoblade. Dream was his *lover*; he was the one crouching in freezing water to fight Dream’s infection; he was the one being there for Dream and helping him through the sickness.

Abruptly, he stopped himself, physically recoiling from his own thoughts as his mind processed them. Gods, how selfish could he be, thinking something like that.

His grip on Dream’s shivering body tightened, “I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you when you needed me,” he whispered, despite knowing Dream was too out of it to understand what he was saying. He

needed to get it out of his chest before the void in his heart, the guilt and shame and self-hatred could grow even more and swallow him whole, “I should’ve realized something was wrong with you and helped you but I rather drowned in my own self-loathing than stop for just a second and think. It wasn’t fair to you and I’m so sorry. I promise, I will never leave you ever again.”

Against his chest, Dream stilled, “What are you talking about. It wasn’t your fault, Georgie. I never blamed you, or Sap. Never.” Dream’s muttered words both lifted a weight off his shoulders and pushed down on his chest at the same time. He kissed his temple a second time, tightening his hug from behind.

He hadn’t even realized that Sapnap and Karl had left the room until the door opened and Karl popped his head inside, “I think we can get him out now.”

George nodded, lifting a hand against Dream’s forehead and feeling his skin. The fever that had scorched his skin red only fifteen minutes earlier had melted away, leaving a warm hue behind. George couldn’t help the sigh of relief. Dream was going to be okay.

Dream became aware with the taste of blood still clogging his mouth and the next thing he knew, he was bent over the frame of a bed and dry heaving onto the floor.

A hand settled on his shoulder, making Dream flinch away *hard* and his back met the wall with a heavy thud. He breathed through the pain when the movement tugged at his wound, eyes darting around to meet whoever had made him jump like that.

Karl stood in front of his bed, a bowl of soup in one hand, the other hovering in the air where Dream had been only seconds ago. His face scrunched up apologetically, “Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you. Are you okay? You looked sick for a second? Do you need anything?”

Dream shook his head, partially to answer Karl’s last question and to also shake the haze of the nightmare away, mind still ringing from distant alarm bells and yelling. He gave Karl a tired smile, wincing at the way his voice dragged along his throat, “M good, Karl.” He paused, frowned and pulled his lip through his teeth in concentration. “What happened?”

“What do you remember?” Karl asked softly, handing him the bowl of soup and waiting for him to take a sip before sitting down on the edge of the bed, a bit of the tension leaving his shoulders and making him slouch.

“George, Sap and me were mining in a cave.” His head hurt, he noticed. A steady pounding that made it hard to think and remember. “We uh, there was a spider spawner?”

It was more of a question than a statement and he winced, looking at Karl in anticipation, hoping that the older could fill in the blanks that covered his mind like cotton. He was still a bit dazed, sleep tugging at the corners of his vision and trying to lure him back down again but he fought back, wanting to clear the confusion and nervousness buzzing under his skin. He fidgeted around with his hands anxiously as Karl stayed quiet for a moment, sorting his thoughts and finding the best way to summarize what happened.

“Well, apparently one of the spiders got a pretty good hit on you. Not that you told Sapnap or George. They had to find out the hard way.” The glare Karl sent him didn’t hold any heat but Dream still felt a lake of guilt pool into his stomach. “You collapsed on them and even though they

brought you back home in time and we managed to stitch you up, you developed a fever in the middle of the night and it took awhile before we were able to break it. It's been three days."

The silence that spread after Karl was finished was a tad too thick for Dream's comfort but he couldn't find any words to stop the weight of Karl's revelation from crushing him. He finally settled on a weak "sorry," eyes looking to the ground.

Three days. He had been out for three days, forcing the other three to take care of him and make sure he didn't die. Gods, they must be so incredibly annoyed with him. Somehow, he'd managed to become an even bigger burden to them, dragging them down and probably wasting a bit of their healing equipment as well.

To his utter surprise, Karl didn't start yelling at him. He only shifted on the mattress into a more comfortable position, and gave him the softest shadow of a smile, raising his hands before dropping them as if he was too afraid to touch Dream, to startle and scare him even more away. "It's okay, Dream. We're not angry at you or anything. Accidents like that happen all the time. You just scared us a little bit when your wound got infected and you got a fever. We were worried."

Dream's head snapped up abruptly and Karl, who hadn't expected such a sudden reaction, leaned back a bit, eyebrows furrowing at him. Dream stayed silent, letting seconds bleed into minutes as he examined Karl, eyes flickering over his face and soaking in every single detail, looking for a sign that revealed Karl was lying with a deeply rooted desperation, catching the way Karl's fingers picked at his cuticles, his jaw tensed up slightly and his right leg bounced up a tad. But no matter how thoroughly he searched, Dream, was only met with a picture of pure honesty and truth.

"You—" His tongue tangled around the words in his mouth, helplessly stumbling and stuttering around them. "You were worried? About me?"

Now it was Karl's turn to study him with an intensity that made his skin crawl and his mind scream at him to hide away from the prying eyes but he stayed put, enduring Karl's heavy gaze in favor for Karl to clear up everything. The confusion was still there, pressing against his chest and demanding for answers.

"Can I..." Karl trailed off, head twitching forward and chin pointing to the empty spot beside Dream. It took the blonde an embarrassing amount of time to realize what Karl wanted, scooting further into the corner of his bed and nodding. Karl was at his side in an instant, hesitation being washed away with a deep exhale as Dream sunk into his side, allowing Karl to sling one arm over his shoulder and pull him down.

Lying on his bed made the exhaustion flare back up again and Dream tried to blink away the sleepiness but Karl's voice was steady and soft and his side hug felt warm and soothing. Holding on to wakefulness became harder and harder with each minute that passed.

"It's okay, Dream. Go to sleep. You're still not fully recovered and you need rest. We'll talk about everything once you're fully awake and feel a little bit better, okay?"

Dream wanted to protest, to fight away sleep but his head felt heavy and the ache still pounding against the inside of his temple got worse. Maybe Karl was right. He tilted his head into the soft fabric of Karl's sweater, coaxing out a low hum in the back of his throat as he let himself go limp against the mattress.

"I missed this," he heard Karl mumble against his hair. "I really, really missed you, Dreamie."

Karl had always been the most physical affectionate out of all his friends, making sure to tell the

others how much he loved them through small squeezes while hand holding or quick hugs and light kisses against the cheek or forehead. Karl's touches were so much different than Quackity's, lighter and unconditional. It ignited something deep in Dream's core, a flame that had been forcefully extinguished without Dream realizing.

Sleepily, Dream turned to his side, looping his arms around Karl and pressing his head against the older man's chest. "I missed you too, Karl" he murmured back, eyes slipping shut before he could catch the smile spreading across Karl's lips.

"Rest, Dreamie. I'm right here if you need anything."

It went on like this for a couple more times. Dream would wake up, disorientated and still partially trapped in a not so pleasant dream before Sapnap, George or Karl could rush to his side and carefully guide him back to the present.

The first couple times, he was only lucid long enough to take a sip of the soup Karl made him or drink a bit of water before dipping back into unconsciousness but the more often he woke up the more he started to become aware of his surroundings and was able to stay up longer, slowly being able to get out more than a few slurred words.

A whole day after the small conversation with Karl, Dream woke up to hushed voices whispering somewhere above his head and a hand running through his hair. There was a weight pressed into him, vibrating against his rib cage.

Panic flooded his senses before his muddled mind could process the familiarity that came with the voices. He shuffled around, feeling the soft mattress underneath him give away. A groan climbed its way up his throat. His body was still aching and sore, side burning but at least the headache had fled away sometime during the night, leaving behind a slightly uncomfortable pressure against his temple.

At the sound escaping his lips, the people around him stopped talking and the hand in his hair paused. "Dream? You awake?"

"Karl?" he mumbled, opening his eyes and trying to blink away the disorientation. He felt a little bit better, the fog that had clung to his head the last couple of days was almost completely gone and he could think a bit more clearer.

"Yep, and Sapnap and George are also here."

Carefully, Dream entangled himself from his bed sheets and let his gaze wander over the room. Morning light flow through the window like melted gold, illuminating his two best friends in soft sun rays. Sapnap and George were sitting on the floor next to his bed, looking like they had just woken up as well, hair and clothes disheveled but they were wearing matching grins as they locked eyes with Dream.

"Good morning, sleeping beauty," Sapnap purred, letting out a snicker at the glare Dream was throwing at him.

Grumbling, Dream turned his head away, pressing himself against Karl's chest, feeling the vibration of a giggle bubble up. The brunette started combing through Dream's hair again as the younger blinked up to him.

Dream gave an appreciating hum, eyes settling on the sleeping feline on his chest "Patches," he

cooed, relaxing further into the bed.

For a moment the world was whole again.

But it couldn't stay like this forever – the events of the last few days hit him with full force, body going rigid and breath stuttering.

"I'm sorry." It wasn't enough, only the shadow of the apology the others deserved for having to take care of his sick self for multiple days on end but it was all Dream could force out of his dry mouth, throat tightening and hands clenching the sheets underneath him.

"Sorry? For what?" George sounded confused and Dream gave him a weak smile. It was nice of them to pretend like it wasn't bothering them, like he wasn't a burden but Dream rather wanted them to hurry up, rip the bandit off and make it quick and brutal, instead of the slow pain they were inflicting on him at the moment. It would be so much easier for all of them if they would just drop the act and tell him what they were really thinking; that he was annoying, nothing more than a liability, a waste of space and food and medical supplies and that he needed to leave.

He opened his mouth to speak, to say something, but the tears in his eyes made the words die on his tongue. All eyes were on him. They felt hot on his skin, ready to burn him down to his bones.

"Dream, what are you talking about?" George tried again. He looked almost concerned but it might have been the light playing a trick on him.

"I'm sorry for wasting your time on trying to heal me. You didn't have to do that," he choked out, wanting to hit himself for the way his voice broke. The self-hatred set his blood on fire. "I would've been fine."

"Okay, that's it." Dream flinched away at Sapnap's sharp tone, not expecting him to speak up. "Dream, look at me."

He almost didn't, the eye contact too intense and the wave of emotions radiating off of Sapnap overwhelmed Dream, taking his breath away and making his heart stumble for a moment. But the urgency echoing in Sapnap's voice forced his head to tilt up and meet his gaze. To his surprise, there was no anger or annoyance laced together in Sapnap's eyes, only frustration and worry. Dream's head spun from his inner turmoil and the confused signals he got from his friends.

Something in Sapnap's eyes softened and it made Dream want to recoil even more. "We are not angry at you for getting injured. We just want to understand why you didn't trust us and told us you got hurt. We want to help you, we really do, but we can't do that if you keep pushing us away."

The protest already lay on Dream's tongue but beside him, Karl raised his hands, silencing him. "Dream, when we treated your injury, we saw your scars." It was such a simple statement, spoken as if the words meant nothing, like they didn't hold any weight, like they didn't make Dream's heart stop beating.

They had seen his scars, the secret that he'd tried so hard to keep away from them. Just like that, the hiding was over and Dream stood in a clearing, exposed and scared of losing his friends more than he already had.

He couldn't even look in the mirror without ending up on the ground, next to the toilet and throwing up the contents of his stomachs. He couldn't image how appalled his friends must've been from seeing him like this. There was so much shame and humiliation pushing down on him, making it hard to breathe. He had done everything to assure that they would never see his scars

only for it to be futile in the end.

He didn't dare to look at his friends, fearing the disgust he might find on their faces. He didn't think he could bear it.

But Karl's hands were still in his hair, on his shoulder, despite knowing the hideous sight that lay under his clothes and Dream didn't understand why he would still want to touch something so damaged and broken like him.

"We want to help you, Dream. But you need to let us in first," Karl said, almost timidly. "We understand if you're not ready, but we talked about it and we think now is a good time. You can tell us as little or much as you want, and we will listen."

They wanted him to talk about the prison. He didn't know why anyone would want to hold such knowledge when the mere thought of the obsidian hell made his hands tremble. But George, Sapnap and Karl looked at him with so much determination and certainty that it made something deep in Dream shift.

He remembered the first time he told Techno about his time in prison, under the dim lights of the antarctic night sky, cold breeze hitting against his skin and grounding him in the present, making sure he didn't slip back into the past while forcing back up the memories. Techno had sat with him the whole night, the soft material of his cloak keeping both of them warm until the sun came back up.

It had been easier with time, words slipping past his lips more effortless despite the tears running down his cheeks because despite the thick guilt of burdening someone with his problems, finally letting out all the despair and grief he had kept so dearly to his heart had made his chest a little bit lighter. He had been able to breathe that night, sitting with Techno on the steps in front of their cabin.

And now, surrounded by his friends –friends he hadn't thought he would ever see again– feeling like he was suffocating yet again, he wanted nothing more than to breathe one more time.

Doubt, guilt and fear were shoving against each other, creating a knot under his rib cage and crushing down on his heart, heavy from emotions. They had seen his scars. There was nothing more left to hide behind, he was out in the opening.

"Can you," he stopped, clearing his throat. "Can you guys promise not to say anything, and just let me talk?"

Receiving eager nods, Dream swallowed thickly.

It was like a card house, he thought. Unstable and fragile, not even able to withhold a gentle breeze of summer air, and one day, inevitably, it would all come crashing down on him. And in a way it already had, hadn't it? A few cards had already come tumbling down and there had been nothing he could've done to stop them. He might as well take a bit of power and control back and make the house fall down with his own hands.

No more hiding, he thought. No more hiding and no more running.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Dream's time in prison.

TW: torture, abuse, blood, dehumanization, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts, self-destructive thoughts

Chapter Notes

Just uploaded an oneshot in case anyone's interested. Just some Dream angst/hurt with some sweet fluff and comfort :D Might be good to read it after this chapter to calm down a bit because this chapter contains some heavy topics. Please make sure to read the TW and don't force yourself to read it if it's too much <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Many sun rises and moon falls ago:

Dream barely remembered the first few months in prison, memories lost in a haze of constant hunger and loneliness and anger at the world. Time had flown by lazily, like the lava running down the sides of his cell – or maybe it passed by normally and he'd just been here for a very, very long time now; it was hard to tell without a calendar. He only had a clock to observe the days pass by and he'd given up counting after the third week.

Sam was nice. He treated him good, or at least as good as he deserved to be treated. Sometimes he had to punish him, take away his food or visitation hours (he hardly got any visitors, anyway) but it was okay because it was Dream's fault for not obeying his orders and following his rules.

One time, after denying Dream his potatoes for four whole days, he'd come into his cell, face stern and expression unreadable. He had positioned himself in front of him, head tilted down to look at his cowering form and told him how disappointed he was, how much the punishments broke his heart, that it hurt him more than Dream. Dream had stopped throwing the clock into the lava after that.

Sam was kind, Dream decided after another seemingly endless torture session as Quackity stepped over his limp body on the ground, avoiding a pool of blood straining the crying obsidian dark red. Sam was kind, because although an empty stomach and a nagging loneliness weren't the most pleasant feelings in the world, he supposed he preferred it over the agony Quackity drew from his flesh every single day since the first time he entered the prison so many suns ago.

It had taken him six torture session to grasp the whole chasm of destruction that now was his life and no matter how many times Quackity visited, Dream couldn't stop the hope from blooming in his chest every time Quackity was slightly late. It never got easier.

The whip was brought down again and again and again, biting into skin and drawing blood and screams and cries. The rope painted a wonderful explosion of welts and scratches along his back and arms, red glistening in the glow of the lava.

“So beautiful,” Quackity whispered, lowering the whip in favor of marveling at the masterpiece he’d created.

Dream just closed his eyes, not bearing the look of pure fascination Quackity was giving him, instead focusing on reminding his body how to breathe, how to move his chest up and down in strong pushes, despite the burning pain beneath his flesh. It was one of the days he was painfully forced to remember Quackity’s true intentions for his visits – he had stopped asking for the revival book a long time ago.

A slap to his face was enough to make his eyes snap open. Quackity was standing right in front of him, one hand gripping the leather collar that circled his throat to force his head back and expose his neck. “I was speaking to you, mutt. Don’t make me switch this thing out with the shock collar again.”

Dream gave him a short nod, watching out of half-lidded eyes as Quackity turned around to retrieve something out of a bag he’d brought with him earlier. He expected to be met with a new knife or the pliers again, not for Quackity to pull out a thoroughly cooked steak. He couldn’t stop his mouth from watering and his eyes from widening when Quackity loosened the bonds on his wrists and indicating for him to come closer.

He knew better than to attempt to walk, using his hands to drag his stiff body over the rough obsidian. He barely felt the stone scraping against his knees and palms. It was nothing compared to the ache spreading through the rest of his limbs.

“I thought I’d be nice to you today and cook you a little something,” Quackity smiled. “Enjoy.”

For a moment, Dream stayed where he was, halfway across the cell and right in front of the offered steak. He wasn’t sure what game Quackity was trying to play with him, but the smell of something more than poisoned potatoes made his stomach growl in anticipation. He didn’t even remember the last time he’d laid his tired eyes on something so delicious and valuable.

In the end, the hunger and greed outweighed the uncertainty and confusion. Cautiously, he lifted a shaky hand, fingers stretching out to touch the warm meat. From the corner of his vision he could see Quackity watching him like a hawk, following his movements in a way that made nausea flare up inside of him but he choose to ignore it, eyes staying fixated on the meal in front of him.

His fingers were mere inches away from the steak but before he could come into contact with it, the familiar feeling of the blunt head of a hammer crashing against bones surged through his body, the loud cracking sound reaching his ears before his mind could even process what just happened.

It took a few seconds for the pain to set in and burn through his arm. With a surprised yelp, he jumped away, steak forgotten and eyes frantically flickering up to Quackity. He was met with a loud, taunting laughter echoing through the cell. “You really thought you deserved a steak? Gods, you are so stupid.”

Dream only let a small whimper escape his mouth before biting down on his tongue with so much force that blood welled up and ran down his dry throat, coating and sticking to it in way that made him want to recoil further into his head. He curled up in himself, cradling his broken arm to his chest as if that would protect him from the evils of the universe. He must’ve looked like an abused puppy, the material of his collar cutting into the underside of his jaw and eyes glassy and wide as

he watched Quackity's next move.

"Don't ever think you deserve more than the disgusting, rotten potatoes you get, understand?" Quackity paused, letting Dream nod before continuing. "Be grateful we're kind enough to even allow you so much even though you don't even deserve the rotten flesh of a zombie. Dogs like you should get nothing but bones to chew on."

He nodded again, accidentally jostling his broken arm a bit too much and letting another whine escape. He flinched away when Quackity's eyes narrowed at the small noise. "Don't make me get the muzzle again. You are so damn annoying today."

Dream lowered his head in remorse, ears filling with static as the voices in his head grew louder, chanting and screaming and laughing at him.

Stupid, stupid, stupid mutt.

It was some time later, after Quackity had left him alone again, that Dream found himself sitting on the opposite side of the wall of lava. Realization hit him with so much force that it paralyzed him, took his breath away. He was cowering at the bottom of a hole he himself had dug, stuck and trapped in his own mistakes and consequences of his actions. A hole he would never be able to escape from. This was no one's fault but Dream's.

He was his own executor.

His eyes were fixated on the pale shimmer the lava threw back at him, fascinated and completely mesmerized by the slowly flowing liquid.

Maybe, he thought, it wasn't that bad to leave this world behind; a world infested by destruction and war and bloodshed; a world that, once upon a time, he had raised out of nothing but his will to unite and protect his friends. He would miss his own creation but he supposed there was an end to everything.

If gods could fall then he could succumb to death herself with ease and no remorse.

Surviving didn't matter to him anymore and life tasted as sallow as death. The only thing keeping him going was spite, the will not to die by the hands of his own torturer. He'd always been petty and stubborn and even the feeling of his own blood running down his skin could never change that.

If he took his own last breath he would only lose as much as Quackity would and for him, that was a win.

The thoughts seemed to come out of nowhere when in reality, deep down, they'd been there for a very long time now, even if he hadn't dared to admit it before. It was like a parasite, like the egg spreading its poison across the server. The thoughts had come slowly, crawling into his way of looking at the world and now he couldn't stop seeing the truth.

He didn't register the heat of the lava, already scorching the first layer of his skin until cool hands wound around his body, forcing him back into the darkness of his cell. His mind was too far gone to recognize the person restraining him, eyes seeing nothing but the veil of burning, hot red in front of him. It was like a lifeline, the ladder leading out of his self-dug hole and just like that it was taken away from him.

He didn't know when he had started yelling incoherently or when the person had pinned him to the ground but he started to thrash even more violently around when the hands on him tightened. He screamed and cried and mourned the loss of his only way out.

He did not manage to take his own breath that day.

The warden had stopped him before anything could happen, pulling him away and forcing a potion of weakness down his throat when he continued struggling against his hold. Dream had woken up an undefined time later, chained to the wall, being forced to look at the lava, seemingly reachable but yet so far away.

The next day, Sam had entered his cell again, steps sturdy and determined. He had installed more chains to the wall, shackles for his ankles to assure his safe distance to the lava. Once on, they never came off again throughout his whole stay in the prison.

The day the chains were put on, Dream allowed himself to cry until Quackity's next visit.

Time moved on like the cruel traitor it was, and Quackity's visits continued. There was a new force behind every hit of the whip, every punch of the hammer and Dream thought it might be Quackity's way of making sure his mutt knew his place; with his knees on the cold floor of his prison cell, trapped and forced to succumb to his torturer.

Quackity was ruthless and vicious and not kind like Sam, but over time Dream learned that the pain was a small prize to pay in exchange for human contact. He caught himself leaning into the touch as Quackity stroke the blood from his pale cheeks more often than flinching away. The gesture was almost loving, almost apologetic, just enough for Dream to imagine it was. When Dream closed his eyes and gave in for just a split moment, he could almost pretend that Quackity actually meant the sweet nothings he whispered into his ear while dragging the rusty blade of one of his knives across Dream's thigh.

Technoblade came into his cell like a savior and a death sentence at the same time. And the first thing Dream tasted under the layers of blood in his mouth, was guilt and regret. He screamed at Technoblade until his throat was scrapped raw but the warrior just lowered himself to the ground, expression unimpressed and studied him with a glint of concern in crimson eyes.

"What did they do to you." It was such a simple question but Dream struggled to form sentences, mouth opening and closing without a sound coming out.

'What did they do to you?' So much. Dream didn't think there were any words that could do the past few months any justice.

And so he stayed silent, glaring at Technoblade from the opposite side of the cell for being seemingly so disinterested by his current predicament. There was far more guilt than anger in Dream's gaze but gods he wanted to punch Technoblade into rationality and sanity that the other man was apparently lacking. He didn't understand why Technoblade had decided to run into Quackity's trap despite obviously knowing his plans to lock him in with Dream. It didn't make sense to Dream why anyone would do something so utterly selfish and stupid just to make sure he was alright.

He had stopped trying to get in contact with Technoblade and cash in his favor when Quackity's visits had started becoming regular. First it was to protect Techno but the more time passed the more he realized that it was for the better if he stayed locked up.

"I just wanted to check up on you. Isn't that what friends do? Make sure the other is alright?"

Technoblade raised one brow, eyes never leaving him.

“We’re not friends,” Dream said coldly, turning around as much as the chains allowed it, and away from Technoblade. “And you should get some sleep before Quackity comes back.”

“Why? What is he going to do?” Dream let out a strained chuckle. What an innocent question, he thought bitterly.

He wished Technoblade had never come for him.

Technoblade’s second night was spent in silence, Dream too exhausted from another torture session to speak and Technoblade too shocked to even try and make a snarky comment. If Dream had any energy left he would’ve laughed, almost feeling honored that he managed to see *the* Technoblade speechless.

Quackity never hurt Technoblade more than a few cuts and whips here and there, far more eager to make him watch as he took Dream apart right in front of him while he could do nothing to stop him and Dream thought that was almost worse. Because now he had to listen while Technoblade shouted and screamed and *begged* Quackity to stop.

He had never wanted to hear Technoblade beg. Especially not for *his* life.

It was one night, or day, Dream wasn’t sure, that he lay on his side, face pressed into the rough ground and futility trying suppress shivers ripping through his battered body, that Technoblade spoke up.

“Come here.” It was so quiet that Dream almost didn’t hear it through the static in his ears. Sluggishly he blinked his eyes open, looking through tear and blood clotted lashes over to where Technoblade was leaning against the caldron.

“Wha-” His voice broke before he could even finish the question. He frowned, carefully moving his arm closer to his chest, cradling the broken limb protectively.

Technoblade rolled his eyes. “Get over here, nerd. I can see you are freezing, probably from blood loss and the cold ground, so just swallow down your pride for once and come here. My cloak is big enough for the two of us and it’s way warmer than those crappy rags you’re wearing.”

Dream was ready to protest, a harsh remark already on the tip of his tongue, but a particularly vigorous tremor shaking through his broken body made him wince and tighten his jaw. Technoblade scoffed.

The restrictions around his ankle were only just long enough to get to Technoblade’s side of the cell, the iron chains clanking across the floor as he tediously dragged himself over.

Once he finally reached the warrior, Technoblade opened his red cloak, letting Dream slip under and be embrace by the warm fabric and the heat radiating off Technoblade.

It was awkward at first. Dream tried to get as much space between him and the other man without having to leave the safety of the cloak, pulling his arms further against his chest to avoid skin contact. He wasn’t used to such closeness for so long. It made his breath speed up and heart beat faster.

“Jeez,” Technoblade mumbled. “Relax. I’m not gonna hurt you, I promise.” It was supposed to

ease a tad of the tension in his bones but Dream could hear the worry laced into Technoblade's tone, and it made him tense up even more. He didn't want pity.

They fell back into silence and Dream had to fight to keep his eyes open. He didn't want fall asleep, too scared to wake up with a knife lodged deep into his flesh because he didn't hear Quackity coming. It happened once and Dream refused to let it happen again. But the softness and warmth and comfortable heaviness of the cloak made him sleepy and the exhaustion dragged at his eyelids, forcing them down despite his protests.

In the end, his attempts to fight sleep were futile.

When he woke up, Quackity hadn't arrived yet and Dream couldn't stop the relieved sigh from escaping his lips. But it was only temporary. His body went rigid when he became aware of something solid at his side. Some time in his sleep he must've shifted to his right because his head had ended up on Technoblade's shoulder.

With burning cheeks, Dream scrambled away.

Neither of them talked about the incidents but the next time Technoblade opened his cloak in a silent invitation, Dream wordlessly accepted it.

Over time, they slowly fell into a rhythm. After Quackity left Dream bleeding and beaten behind, Techno would come and pick up the pieces. He would try and tend his wounds as best as he could, offer him portions of his food to get a little bit of energy back and make sure he didn't freeze to death, lifting his cloak and providing Dream shelter from the cruelty of the cell. They would take shifts to keep watch at night, one of them looking out for Quackity while the other rested. When nightmares would haunt one of them, the other was there to carefully talk them out of the hazy panic and ground them in the present.

A new emotion towards Techno bloomed up in Dream's heart. It was far more than the respect and appreciation for the warrior. They got closer, bonding over their doomed fates. Dream didn't have any words to describe whatever bond formed between the two. They had shifted from rivals to something more, and if Dream was especially daring, he would almost call it a friendship.

Quackity hated it when he went non-verbal, which was why he often used to push through, forcing words over his lips that didn't want to be spoken. They always ended up mumbled, slurred together and in the end it made things only worse because Quackity always demanded that Dream spoke clearly and audibly. With Quackity it was like playing with fire, no matter what, it was inevitable you would burn yourself.

Techno was so much different than Quackity.

He never pressured Dream into talking, instead created a new system for the both of them to communicate when Dream's voice failed him. The system was easy and simple: a tapping system. It wasn't made to keep up whole conversations, but for them it was enough.

Techno was a good story teller, Dream came to learn. And Dream was a good listener. Sometimes, when insomnia clawed at both of their consciousnesses, they would spend hours sitting under Techno's soft cloak, talking about Zeus's wrath or Persephone and spring. They would talk and talk until their voices were hoarse and their mouths dry.

It was what kept them going, both of them. The little banters in between torture sessions and the

quiet chuckles they would share under the safety of the cloak.

They fought together against insanity and sometimes Dream thought that he would've already gone crazy without Techno. If the guilt wasn't still eating away at him for being the reason why Techno was in the cell in the first place, he would've been glad for his comforting presence. But every visit, Quackity made sure to remind him that Techno was here because of him. And if Dream wasn't already damaged beyond repair, this might have been his breaking point.

Without Techno, Dream would've never made it this far.

"If you fight with all your might, there is a chance of life; whereas, death is certain if you cling to your corner," Techno muttered, tightening the cloak around Dream's shivering body.

The blonde stilled for a moment before croaking out a response, "Sun Tzu, The Art of War."

Techno's brows shoot up as he eyed Dream in surprise. "You read it?"

"No," Dream said, a bemused smile stretching over cracked lips. "I only know a few quotes."

Techno hummed, tilting his head and studying Dream for a few seconds before letting his gaze wander over the small cell. "When we get out of here, I will make you read it."

"You mean *if* we get out of here."

"Dream, stop." Techno's voice was sharp, deterrent but there was a soft edge to his tone. "We will get out of here, I promise. And until then, we won't succumb to Quackity's will and let him break us. Don't make me repeat the quote. I know you understood exactly what I meant with it, Smiley"

To Dream, Techno was the force that kept him going, like the wind driving the ships across the water. But if Techno was the wind, then Quackity was the sea, big and scary and inescapable. And today, it was a stormy night and the waves were malicious and vicious.

He waited until Techno fell asleep a few hours later before carefully untangling himself from his embrace, cautious to not wake the other man out of his peaceful slumber, before slowly crawling to the chest a few blocks away. It had been a while since he last opened it. Quackity had broken his hand a couple of weeks back and he hadn't been able to hold a pencil even if there was anything he could have been writing about.

The broken bones were still not fully healed, Sam making sure to only give him the bare necessities when it came to health and regain potions but he could move his fingers enough to bring words onto a crinkled paper, albeit sloppy and messy, blood dripping down and straining the white page red.

If Techno was right— which he doubted— and they would actually managed to escape, then Dream had to plan his next steps once he was out. He didn't have anywhere to go, no house, no home, no one that would give him shelter. He was certain Techno would leave him the moment they successfully escaped and the favor was repaid. The thought made his heart oddly heavy and throat tighten up but he tried not to dwell on it, instead focusing on his plans.

Out of prison, there was no where to go for him. He didn't have anything anymore, that his former self had made sure of. But it was okay, in a way. He didn't think he would have the strength to keep going anyway.

And so he sat down and took the crinkled piece of paper in his hand, poured out his heart and mind into the letter. Thorns dug into his chest when he was finished and he smiled, relishing in the pain. A bitter satisfaction spread through him as he reread the letter one, two, three times before putting it back into the chest where it would dust over and wait for him to come back if the prison break did actually happen one day.

He didn't want Techno to find it, a sad excuse of a death wish, messily scribbled down and tugged away.

He hoped Sapnap would make it quick, that he didn't let him suffer like Quackity did, but he supposed he couldn't blame him if he decided to make it painful.

No matter what, Dream would welcome his blade with open arms.

Dream barely remembered the day Techno vanished. One moment, he was next to him, the next he was gone, leaving a fuming Quackity and horrified Dream behind.

Dream didn't know what he had done next. There were only ghostly shadows of washed out memories – him cowering in the farthest corner of the cell; watching Quackity scream at Sam and Sam shout at Quackity; the dim glow of the lava flowing back down and blocking the view of his torturer and warden; the distant pain of nails scratching across skin as he desperately tried to drag himself away from the upcoming panic attack.

The next few days were a haze of fear and confusion and dismay.

He didn't understand what he had done wrong, why Techno had escaped without him, why he had been left behind.

Quackity didn't visit him for a while but Dream was sure it was only a question of *when* he would come back, not *if*.

Without Techno by his side to ground him, Dream could slowly feel himself slip away, into insanity or sorrow, Dream didn't know. He cried until he had no tears left to shed and then a little bit more.

When Techno came back for him, he didn't process what was happening until they were already out in the opening, brain muddled and sluggish. He had only enough time to pull the letter for Sapnap out of the chest before Techno holstered him up in his arms and dragged him out of the familiarity of his cell.

Once outside, he screamed when the bright sun hit his eyes and scorched his skin. There were too many colors and sounds and scents and it drove Dream crazy. He almost begged Techno to take him back to his cell.

But Techno kept calm, ripping off a stripe of his clothes to tie around Dream's head, protecting his eyes from the sudden overstimulation after spending so much time in the dark.

He kept Dream close to his chest, wrapping the cloak tight around Dream's trembling body and carrying him all the way to the antarctic where Phil already awaited them on the front porch. It was the last thing Dream saw, before unconsciousness dragged him away.

The first time Dream woke up since his escape, he woke up crying. Techno was at his side in an instant, holding him and letting him sob into his shoulder. It was tears of disbelief and relief that

were running down Dream's cheeks as he tightened his death-grip around Techno.

The warrior, his rival— his *friend*— just pulled him closer to his body, mumbling apologies into his shoulder, asking Dream to forgive him for not coming back for him sooner. Dream just cried more.

Chapter End Notes

only question left is, is Dream actually going to tell Sapnap, Karl and George about Quackity...

Tomorrow is my birthday, so I don't know when the next upload will be. I'll try my best tho.

Until then, make sure to take care of yourself <3

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Dream finally told his friends about the prison

TW: Referencing torture and abuse (scars)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Throughout the whole telling, Dream's voice had been shaky and referring to Quackity as 'sir' had still been easier than actually saying his name – feeling the looks of horror against his skin was a small prize for keeping away vivid images – but he'd pulled through, tried to keep the words from jumbling together and pushed out the truth that had been clawing at his conscience ever since he'd stepped foot into Kinoko Kingdom, waiting to be let out or swallowed down and locked up till the day he died. He had managed to tell them, talking about the events with a strange sensation of distance, as if it wasn't his own memories he was reminiscing about.

But now that he was finished, all of his emotions came crashing down all at once. Shame, guilt, humiliation, and fear tightened around his throat, slowly suffocating him with the knowledge that he had laid all the cards open. He didn't regret telling his friends, at least he thought he didn't. There was something horrifyingly relieving about letting out the brutally honest truth.

He kept his eyes carded to the ground, waiting for the final judgment.

“Dream?”

He swallowed and opened his mouth to reply, only to find the words dying in his throat. Out of his peripheral vision he saw Karl raising his arm and he flinched away before he could stop himself. He didn't know what to make of this situation, couldn't tell what his friends were thinking and it made him jumpy; uncertainty and anxiety mixing together and forming a knot in his chest.

Karl's hand paused midair. “Is it okay if I touch you?”

He nodded because there wasn't much else he could do with no voice. His body was tense as Karl carefully and gently placed his arm around Dream's shoulder and pulled him closer against his chest and it took Dream a moment before he slowly relaxed into the hold.

“Thank you,” Karl whispered softly. “Thank you for telling us.”

Still sitting next to the bed, Sapnap cleared his throat. “Seriously Dream. We know how hard that was for you, but you did it, and we are so proud of you.”

“So incredibly proud,” George mumbled. He and Sapnap got up from the ground, crawling onto the mattress next to Karl and Dream and – after a confirming nod from Dream – joining the hug.

Dream blinked. He didn't know what he'd expected but it certainly wasn't that. There were so many things he could've added, so many more words he could've said, but his voice didn't want to work and so he stayed silent, burying his face into Karl's shoulder, leaning against Sapnap and

George's arms and hoping his friend didn't need any verbal affirmations to know how grateful he was.

There were tears, he noticed, quietly rolling down his cheeks, but it was more from the overwhelming feeling of relief than sadness.

He knew his friends wanted to ask more questions, wanted to talk more about what had happened and pry even more information out of him but for now they stayed quiet, trying to negotiate their own feelings and beliefs and processing the things Dream had revealed. One day they would have to discuss what the revelation meant, for him, for his friends, for everyone involved – but not today.

They stayed like this for a while, basking in the comfortable silence before Karl gently shooed him into the bathroom and under the shower where he stayed for a long time, feeling the water run down his naked skin, pretending it could wash the memories down the drain as well.

This was nice, he decided, and he hoped that it would stay like this forever – whatever *this* was. It was hard to believe because nothing good had ever stayed, but maybe this one time the universe would be kind to him and keep his past far, far away from him.

He stayed under the shower until the water ran cold and the shivers got unbearable. There were clothes laid out for him on the toilette and a towel thrown over the sink. He dried himself off, trying his best not to catch his reflection but in the end it was a fruitless attempt and his eyes found the mirror, gaze flickering down to his naked body.

The scars that criss-crossed his body looked a bit like a map, he thought. A map leading to the darkest place in his life.

He didn't know how long he stood there, feeling a sick satisfaction in forcing his eyes to take in every bit of scar tissue burned into his flesh. A knock against the bathroom door made him jump but it wasn't enough to tear his gaze away from the mirror.

"Dream?" It was George. "You've been in there for a while. I just wanted to check up on you and make sure everything's alright."

He pushed the words over his lips before he could hesitate and stop himself. "The door is unlocked." He sounded hollow in a way that made him wince.

Out of the corner of his eyes he saw the door open and George step through. For a split second, he froze in the door frame, surveying the scene in front of him, before moving forward until he was standing right behind Dream who averted his eyes, too scared to find even a hint of disgust on George's face. Shame washed over him and made his skin itch.

A hand came up, hovering in the air for a moment and giving Dream time to move away. When he stayed still, George slowly lowered his hand down, skin meeting skin as he came in contact with Dream's shoulder. The hand paused on the burn marks left behind by Quackity's lighter before traveling down his arm, over the claws caused by the whip, down to the scar carved into his skin by a screwdriver.

George's touch was so light, so careful, without any pain following.

Dream finally looked up, locking eyes the same moment George placed a kiss against his shoulder blade. Through the glass of the mirror, George smiled at him. There was no pity or sadness in the smile and Dream felt like he could finally breathe again after being suffocated for so long.

“They don’t define you, Dream.” The familiarity and comfort of George’s accent made him lean back a bit, his back pressing into the older’s chest as his lover’s voice soothingly filled his ears.

He turned around, arms settling against George’s waist. He pulled him closer, pressing his lips against George’s, tasting copper from his cheek he’d anxiously chewed on earlier and salt – he hadn’t even noticed he’d started crying again. George didn’t seem to mind, arms wrapping around his shoulders and kissing back.

It was a sweet kiss, slow and soft and Dream felt himself relax into George’s arm, tension leaving his sore muscles.

“Allow us to take care of you, just for today, okay?” George whispered after they pulled away. “We’re going to be okay.”

And for once, Dream believed him.

Karl stood in the kitchen, back against the island and waiting for the water to finish boiling so he could set up tea. He could hear Sapnap shuffle around in the living room and the shower being turned off, signaling that Dream would be out soon.

For a moment, he closed his eyes and allowed himself a break from the overwhelming events of the past few days. He felt relieved, endlessly happy that they had finally gotten Dream to talk. Knowing they could take a bit of the heavy burden off of Dream was worth the weight of Dream’s confession.

Now that they finally knew, they could start mapping out Dream’s triggers and find a way to help him. They already knew Dream had violent nightmares, experienced flashbacks, dissociation, and would go non-verbal if overwhelmed. On top of that, he was fighting against self destructive thoughts and a very bad relationship towards pain. It was a lot, and Karl had to take a deep breath, collecting himself before going on. Finally having a mental list of Dream’s issues in front of him was both reassuring and overwhelming. There was so much they had to keep in mind, so much they had to work on, but at least they finally knew what they were fighting against. They had finally made a big step forward and for Dream that was a huge accomplishment.

Arms enveloped him and a kiss was placed on the tip of his nose. He giggled, blinking down a little to see Sapnap stand in front of him, smiling at him softly.

“Hi, gorgeous.”

“Hey, handsome,” Sapnap whispered back, letting out a chuckle. “You making tea?” He tilted his head, gesturing towards the tea kettle on the kitchen counter. Karl nodded.

“Yeah, I also baked cookies yesterday. Thought we could have a lazy day. Dream probably needs it.”

Sapnap hummed, not letting him go as the water was finished boiling, only shifting his position so he could cling onto Karl’s side as the older prepared the tea and a plate of pastries.

Karl laughed fondly, giving his head a pet. “You are so clingy today. What’s up with that?”

“What, am I not allowed to want cuddles from my own lover?” Sapnap pouted, tightening his arms around Karl’s middle. Resting his chin on his fiancé’s shoulder, he watched him pour the tea into four cups. “Just felt like being near you right now.”

Karl didn’t say anything, giving Sapnap a reassuring squeeze. Of course did Sapnap not want to be left alone after having to listen to how his best friend had been tortured over and over again for months on end.

“He’s going to be okay,” Karl said softly. There was a note of determination in his voice though, and for once, he truly meant it.

He took the plate of cookies and one of the cups of tea in his hands, indicating for Sapnap to take the rest of the cups before, followed by Sapnap, walking towards the living room.

He was just about to place everything onto the small table in front of the two couches when the door opened and George and Dream stepped in. The latter had Patches in his arms, cradling her protectively against his chest as he trailed after George. His eyes were averted to the ground. He looked shy, soft with his still wet hair and big sweater Karl swore he’d seen Sapnap wear once – but underneath all of it Karl caught a glimpse of the warrior he’d come to know. The way he carried his body, no longer cowering or shoulders drawn, the spark in his eyes that Karl hadn’t seen in such a long time. For a moment the old Dream stood in front of him, the one who’d welcomed him on his server with open arms and wide smile, the one who’d bantered and laughed and messed around with his friends.

It was going to be okay.

Karl let himself fall against the couch, tapping the seat next to him and gesturing for the others to sit down as well. Dream was hesitant at first, cautiously moving forward until he was standing in front of the couch. His face was twisted in a frown, chewing on his lip in a stance of uncertainty. Karl just smiled up at him gently, tilting his head to the side and tapping the cushion a second time.

The troubled expression didn’t fully vanish as Dream let himself sink down into the softness of the couch, but for Karl it was enough. Patches was placed on Dream’s lap while George squeezed himself in next to Dream. The space was a bit tight, but George didn’t seem to care, happy to be as close to his lover as possible. Sapnap lowered himself to the ground, legs folding beneath him and positioning himself right in front of the couch.

The weather outside was inclement. It wasn’t raining, but a dark gray sheet of clouds covered the sky and it was cold enough that Sapnap had lit the fireplace earlier, bringing the room into a soft orange glow.

It took Dream a while to relax but after a few minutes Karl felt a weight press against him. He looked down to see Dream’s head leaning against his shoulder, one hand clasped around George’s who gently rubbed his thumb on the back of Dream’s hand. Dream’s other hand was in Sapnap’s hair, who’d propped himself up against Dream’s legs. Karl couldn’t help the smile as he locked eyes with George over Dream’s head.

The tension in Dream’s shoulders eased the more time passed. Somewhere in between munching on a cookie and reminiscing about an old, dust covered memory, Karl’s hand had found its way into Dream’s hair, soothingly scratching across his scalp and gently making the younger relax further against him.

No one brought up what Dream had revealed to them only an hour ago, focusing on giving Dream comfort and the blissful act of distraction. They could talk about it more later. For now, it was all

about making sure that Dream didn't regret opening up and making him feel comfortable and safe.

Dream was still not fully recovered from his injury and eventually exhaustion overcame him. His breathes evened out and his eyes slipped shut. He looked peaceful, the creases of stress washed away and worries pushed into the background for a moment.

Karl must've fallen asleep as well, the warmth and comfort of his friends luring him down into the darkness. A tad disorientated, he blinked the drowsiness out of his eyes and looked around, trying to find whatever had woken him up.

His gaze met Sapnap's, as equally confused as his. For a second they just sat there, listening to any suspicious sounds until a knock against the front door breached the silence.

Sapnap raised a brow but Karl just shrugged, tipping his chin down to Dream who was half draped over him. Sapnap nodded, standing up from the floor and stretching his limbs before leaving the living room to open the door.

George had woken up as well, owlshly blinking around the room. "What..."

"Someone's at the door," Karl whispered. "Sapnap's gone looking what's going on."

Both of them went quiet, trying to eavesdrop at whatever was going on in the hallway outside. Muffled voices pierced through the walls, but they weren't loud enough for Karl or George to recognize who Sapnap was speaking to.

The house fell quiet once again until Sapnap's panicked voice called out. "Wait, no-"

The door to the living room was flung open and someone stepped inside. Sapnap was right behind the person, one hand outstretched as to stop them, eyes wide with surprise and fear.

Karl straightened up, recognizing the person instantly. "Quackity?"

"Where is he?" Quackity wasn't even looking at him, eyes surveying the room and the excitement gracing Karl's face fell into a frown.

To his right, Dream shot upright, frantically jumping up from the couch and backing off, sleep instantly fleeing from his bones. Violent tremors shook his body, eyes fixated on Quackity. He looked like a wild animal, cornered and scared for his life. For a moment it was quiet, everyone having fallen into a stupor at Dream's sudden reaction.

Quackity was the first to move, an unreadable expression settling over his face as he examined the blonde. He hummed, stepping closer. "So he is really here."

Karl's frown deepened before it finally clicked, quickly scrambling to get in between Quackity and Dream. "Hey, no, wait--"

For the first time since Quackity had entered their house, his gaze fell upon Karl. There was none of the warmth, none of the love that Karl was used to. He was looking into the calculated and cold eyes of someone who'd seen who he thought was a tyrant on the loose, ready to put him back into prison. "Okay, you are probably here to get Dream back into Pandora's Vault but let us explain first, okay?"

He let out a relieved sighed when Quackity made no move to come closer, giving them the

opportunity to clear things up. They would tell him their side of the story and that Dream wasn't really evil and then they could move on to other things and celebrate that their lost lover was finally back. It was going to be okay.

Behind him, Dream had latched onto his sweater, fingers frantically clenching around the fabric and holding on tight.

"I know this is going to sound really crazy but all the things Dream did since Tommy's exile wasn't really him. He was possessed by the egg, just like Bad was. It was not his fault."

Quackity was quiet for a split second before his face twisted into humorless, high pitched laughter. "Really? Is that actually what he told you? Oh my gods, that's *pathetic*." He let out a few more chuckles, before schooling his expression. "Anyway, if you excuse me now, I have to bring an escaped prisoner back to jail."

"Quackity," Sapnap tried, placing a hand on the other's shoulder only to be shaken off. Karl could see the hurt filling his lover's eyes before he could push it down in favor of stopping Quackity from taking their best friend away. "He's telling the truth. Come on, let us sit down and talk things out, alright?"

"He is going back to prison. End of the discussion," Quackity snarled, looking over at Dream.

Karl swore he heard Dream let out a small whimper and his frown deepened as he observed Quackity's body language. Everything seemed to go still around him as realization slowly seeped in.

It was like a puzzle, unfinished and some pieces missing but in hindsight Karl felt like he should've known. Because although Dream had still kept some pieces from them, the whole picture had been right there in front of them, waiting for them to recognize it.

Oh gods.

Oh gods.

"It's you," he breathed out, making the room fall silent, all eyes landing on him. Behind him, Dream restlessly shifted around and the grip on Karl's sweater tightened, telling him everything he needed to know. He was right. Abject horror surged through his veins. His heart skipped a beat before speeding up, stumbling over itself.

Quackity blinked at him for a few seconds before acknowledgment flashed in his eyes.

"I'm surprised he never told you," Quackity said, voice sickeningly sweet but his smile was a traitor with a sharp blade. Karl had to force his gaze to stay trained on Quackity and fight down the nausea pooling in his gut.

He remembered going on a date with Sapnap and Quackity, a very long time ago. It had been a complete disaster but at the end of the evening they had ended up on the floor of Sapnap's house, wet from an unfortunate fall into a river, and laughing until their voices were hoarse and tears of over-spilling joy ran down their cheeks. It was one of Karl's favorite memories, something he often looked back on when the ache in his heart from missing Quackity hurt a little bit too much.

It was hard to believe that the man from that memory was the same person who was now standing in front of him, looking more like a mockery of the lover he used to know. Looking into Quackity's eyes, Karl saw something unhinged, something that made an icy shiver wash down his spine. There was something wrong about Quackity, the way he held his body, stiff, chest out as if

wanting to make himself look bigger, threatening, his fingers twitching at his side like he was holding himself back from taking out a weapon. But no, he wouldn't. Right?

For the first time in his life, Karl was genuinely scared of Quackity.

"You tortured him, you sick fuck!" The atmosphere of the room shifted from tense to suffocating in seconds, telling Karl that Sapnap and George had finally caught on to what was going on. He felt Sapnap's gaze bore into him but he ignored it in favor of focusing on Quackity "How could you do something like that? Why? Dream used to be your friend!"

Quackity clicked his tongue, folding his arms across his chest in a stance of pure disinterest. Karl had to stop himself from throwing himself at him. "Oh please. Don't act like he's a good person. Did you all forget what he did?"

"We already told you," Sapnap stepped in, tone harsh. "He was possessed by the egg."

Karl could feel Dream recoil even further, sinking into himself as Quackity let out a cool laughter. "And you believe that? He's manipulating you. Can't you see it? Manipulating and lying is all he's good at. Don't let him fool you."

The anger in Karl's veins frothed up like waves crashing against the ocean shore, fueled by the tight grip Dream had on his clothes. "Even if he wasn't possessed by the egg – which he was – it does not give you the right to torture him. No one deserves torture, not matter what."

"He killed a child in prison!"

Dream let out another whimper, pressing further against Karl's back.

"Torturing someone doesn't make you any better than the person you are torturing!"

"That's enough. If you don't let me take him back then I will have to resort to more drastic measures." Karl didn't even have time to process anything. One second Quackity was standing in front of him, gaze locked onto Dream, the next he had a potion in his hand, throwing it to Karl's feet where it crashed onto the floor, glass shattering and purple, blue contents spilling everywhere.

The last thing his mind registered, was the pressure of Dream's grip loosening and voices screaming his and Dream's names before the harsh smell of fermented spider eye clogged his nose and he lost balance, falling right into darkness.

Dream woke up confused and disorientated. There was a hand covering his eyes and he tried to shake it off but whoever the hand belonged to was stubborn and a second hand came up to keep his head still.

"Wha-," he rasped.

"Dream." It was George. There was an edge to his voice that made Dream's stomach flip and panic take over his veins. "For once in your life, Dream, please don't move."

"Take your hands away, George." The grip on his head tightened, making any attempts to shake the hands off futile.

“No.”

“George-”

“I said no, Dream. Please, just listen, okay?” George urged, the desperate tone in his voice getting louder.

But Dream didn’t need to see to *know*. Because there was leather scraping against his throat, rubbing on his skin and the rough surface under his head spoke more than George ever could. For a moment he wished George’s hands would’ve been enough to protect him from the truth. But he supposed he’d never been that lucky.

It felt like standing in the end after killing the Enderdragon, feeling the void call out for their missing piece, the numbness and grief the darkness shared with you and all Dream could do was close his eyes, press his face further against the harsh obsidian floor of the prison cell and let the vertigo of emotions consume him.

Chapter End Notes

oops, looks like I accidentally dropped some angst on you guys...anyways, enjoy suffering with Dream :D

aaahhhh school starts again next week which means a lot of exams and I really hate my life. That's definitely gonna be a lot of fun /s

Hope you enjoyed the chapter. I'm not 100% satisfied with it but whatever. It was kinda funny watching you guys come up with theories as to how Sapnap, Karl and George find out about Quackity knowing exactly how it would happen haha. Hope it met your expectations and you weren't disappointed :) Gotta get things rolling now. The next few chapters are definitely gonna be...interesting. Prepare yourself for a lot of angst and hurt.

Also, omg thank you so much for all the happy birthday wishes! You guys are so sweet!!! You made my day <3

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Back in prison.

TW: torture, blood, dehumanization, descriptive depiction self-harm

Chapter Notes

Once again, please read the TW before reading the chapter. Dream is not having a good time and it shows.

me: I'm not really satisfied with what I wrote. I don't like it. I actually hate it.
you guys: omg that was so good!! you are the best! your writing style is godly!!!!
istg, you guys are way too sweet <3 Thank you for all the feedback and motivation

The quiet whispers of the lava and the clicking noises of the redstone contraptions were the only sounds filling the silence. Sam hadn't said a single word since Quackity had come to him this morning. His brows were slightly furrowed in a conflicted stance but he didn't dare to speak up against Quackity and so they stood there in silence, waiting for the lava to fall.

The grip on the bag tightened, the clinking and clashing of iron and wood colliding with each other sounding all so familiar as Quackity continued to stare forward. He had missed this, his daily trips to the Vault. He couldn't wait to see Dream again.

Months spent looking for the prisoner on the loose only to find him taken in by his past lovers. Thinking about the traitors made anger and frustration curl in his gut, but when the veil of lava finally parted and his eyes locked on the four people cowering on the floor of the cell, the ugly emotions were quickly overshadowed by pride and satisfaction swelling up in his chest.

He had done this. He had located Dream all by himself, had hunted him down and captured him, had freed the lands from his tyranny once more. And he had found three traitors alongside it. He had done this, all alone.

Holding his head high and chest out, he stepped onto the small platform before it could move over to the cell without him. There was still blood, dried and sticking to the walls of the confinement from his last visit months ago. Neither Sam nor Quackity had been keen on cleaning the cell after Dream's escape, too busy with trying to find out where the monster had gone.

It was kind of gross, he thought, stepping over a particular large puddle of crimson. But he'd seen worse, done worse.

His past friends started shouting at him the moment he set food over the netherite decorating the ground, throwing themselves against the chains restricting them. Quackity ignored them, blending them out in favor of focusing on the monster that had pressed his back into the obsidian behind

him, as if that would protect him from Quackity.

He scoffed, putting down the bag and opening it. He could feel Dream's eyes on him. There was a new flame flickering in the dark green, a fire Quackity had been sure to put out the first time he'd been here. He sighed, preparing himself to redo all his hard work.

He shuffled through the bag for a moment before pulling out a knife. It wasn't anything fancy, the blade was small and sharp and able to cut through flesh with finesse and ease. It was a great start to get things running again.

The shouts grew louder when he turned around and he groaned. Annoyance welled up, making his fist painfully clench around the handle of the knife.

"Can you shut the fuck up?" It seemed to be enough to silence his past friends, the sudden yell having startled them into a stupor. A part of him bled thinking about his friends – his *lovers* – locked up in the Vault but then past memories flared back up – how his fiancé's had left him, had gone away and built a whole nation without him – and the pain quickly turned into anger. Quackity let out a relieved exhale, straightening his posture. "If any of you continue to annoy me then Dream won't be the only one bleeding out on the obsidian tonight, understand?"

"Don't you dare."

It took Quackity a few seconds to realize who had spoken up. He snapped around to Dream who had managed to push his body up, shaky legs supported by the wall. His face was contorted into a snarl, eyes dark with wild fury. "Don't you dare touch any of them."

Oh, Quackity thought, curiously looking the admin up and down. He hadn't seen him like this in quite some time. The will to fight looked good on him, but utter defeat looked even better.

Oh, they were going to have so much *fun*.

"Now, Dream," he said, voice dripping sweet acid. "I'm sure you haven't forgotten our little rules, now have you?"

There it was, the fear infesting his eyes, traveling down his spine and making his body go rigid. Quackity's lips twisted up into a smile as Dream tried to take a step backwards but he was stopped by the wall behind him.

Quackity slowly crept closer, like a predator, ready to devour his prey. "You just spoke without permission," he continued, making sure to draw out every single word. "You just moved without permission, and you didn't address me correctly." He clicked his tongue, taking another step until he was right in front of Dream, who was trembling under his fierce gaze. "You know what that means, don't you?"

He waited – watched the conflict rage in Dream's eyes, how the urge to submit fought against the rebellious part.

Deciding to be nice and help out a little bit, Quackity raised his hand, stroking Dream's cheeks in what would be a tender gesture if it wasn't for the blade of the knife cutting through the first layer of skin. It wasn't enough to leave a scar behind, only drawing a fine line of blood that ran down to his chin and onto his sweater, turning light gray dark.

"I asked you a question, *mutt*."

The last word seemed to do the trick, eyes glazing over with memories, trapping him, and Quackity

watched with sick fascination as Dream got lost in a maze of a traumatizing past and horrible present until he couldn't differentiate between what *had been* and what *was*.

"Yes, sir."

There it was. Quackity let the knife hover for a few seconds before letting it run down Dream's neck, leaving behind a red trail on pale skin.

"Yes, sir, what?"

"Yes, sir. I know what that means."

"So, what does it mean?"

Dream swallowed thickly, eyes flickering around, trying to avoid direct eye contact. "The muzzle, sir." It was barely above a whisper and Quackity laughed.

So shy.

With a satisfied hum, he pulled the muzzle out of his pocket, relishing in the way Dream flinched away as he pulled it over his mouth. It went snugly over his chin and nose, tight but not tight enough so that he couldn't breathe. Quackity made sure that the seam of the leather bit into Dream's jaw.

He remained like that for a while, staring at Dream and feeling the power run through his veins by having the strong admin fall apart between his fingers. Knowing he had Dream in his clutches, had him submit and succumb to him so easily – it was sweet, it was wonderful, it was exhilarating. Once upon a time, Dream's name had been enough to ignite fear across the lands. Now all the power was in the palm of Quackity's very own hand.

Behind him, Sapnap was brave enough for an outcry despite the warning, and Quackity rolled his eyes, grabbing Dream's hair and pulling him away from the wall.

"He's a rabid fucking *dog*." He snapped, sighing slightly in relief when everyone went quiet. "I'm doing you all a favor with this! Even if you can not see that yet. Now," he said, looking back down to his bag. "With what do we wanna start today?"

Dream's whole body was flooded with agony – his flesh, his veins, his bones.

Quackity was using the one that teared at his skin and Dream closed his eyes, waiting for the sweet relief of normality to overcome him because wasn't that what he had wanted? All his time in Kinoko Kingdom he'd been moments away from dropping to his knees and begging them to hit him, to treat him in a way that was right, that he deserved. But now that he was finally getting what he wanted, there was no relief. Even worse – if it wasn't for the muzzle, he thought he might've started pleading for Quackity to stop.

And all the while, his friends were watching, with wide eyes that were reflecting his own shock and terror and Dream couldn't bear looking at them, couldn't stand seeing his own fears carved into their faces.

It was like back when Techno had came into his cell for the first time, being forced to watch without being able to help.

It never got easier.

And so he locked their voices and cries out, only concentrating on the pain setting his limbs afire and trying not to fall apart again.

He hated himself for succumbing to Quackity's will so easily, for falling back into old habits as if he'd never escaped in the first place. It made him realize how weak he was in comparison to Quackity, that no matter how hard he tried, he would be nothing more than the rabid dog for Quackity to force back into his place.

Quackity had found the wound on his side, slowly pulling out stitch after stitch. Dream's vision whitened out, his ears buzzing with static. Quackity was over him, pushing his body down onto the ground, restraining him without needing any chains. Dream couldn't breathe. He would've screamed if every inhale of air didn't make him choke on pain and blood and the muzzle around his head didn't clamp his mouth shut.

A few times, his blurry eyes would catch onto the distorted faces of his friends and he almost threw up at the pity and worry he found and the knowledge that he was the reason for their concerns almost hurt as much as Quackity's knife dragging across his flesh.

He stayed on the ground way after Quackity had left the cell, curled up on the ground and trying to stifle his sobs before he could choke on too little oxygen because of the muzzle. It shouldn't hurt this much, shouldn't be this big of a deal because he had already experienced this once, should already be used to it – it shouldn't be possible for his heart to tear even more, but somehow it was.

It was about control, he distantly thought. About who was pulling the strings.

His limbs were stiff and sore but he bit his lip, tightened his jaw and pushed through the pain, hauling himself over to the wall opposite of his friends.

Somewhere behind him, he could hear Sapnap – or maybe it was George, he couldn't tell – calling his name, asking him to come over but he didn't even do as much as turn his head.

Once he reached the wall, his hands glided over the rough surface, fingernails digging into the small holes in between the stone. He stared at the obsidian for a while, forgetting himself in the cragged rock. His mind was muddled – reaching, longing for something he didn't know what it was.

Blood was dripping down his side. His sweater stuck to his chest and it made him want to crawl out of his skin, leave his body behind like it was nothing but a costume he could peel off. He could still feel Quackity's hands on him, as if he had burned his hand prints into his flesh; he might as well had done exactly that.

It was all about control. Taking back part of the power over his own body and pain.

He didn't think about it, just did it – pulling his head back before slamming it against the wall in front of him. His friends were screaming again, the clattering of chains echoing through the cell but he barely registered it, too focused on silencing the pain Quackity had inflicted on him. His head was throbbing but that didn't stop him. He just continued hitting the wall a second time, harder until a crimson liquid ran down his forehead, dripping onto his eyelashes and soaking his vision

red.

His breathes were ragged but it felt good, so much different than the unbearable agony Quackity had carved into his skin. He felt better – finally in control over the situation.

He banged his head onto the obsidian again and again, a laughter bubbling up in his throat. He sounded hysteric, crazy, but he didn't care, just closed his eyes and relished in his very own utopia of self-inflicted pain.

There was no way to describe the emotions Karl was feeling in this moment – sitting on the ground of a cell in Pandora's Vault, forced to his knees and one arm painfully twisted to fit into cuffs chained to the wall, watching one of his best friends lose his sanity.

From utter confusion and anguish as to why his *own lover* would lock them up and torture Dream, to overwhelming horror and shock as he watched Dream slam his head against one of the walls over and over again, tears mixing with blood and dripping down his face. He couldn't tell if it was sobs or distorted laughter ripping through the muzzle (a fucking *muzzle*, Karl had almost thrown up when Quackity had forced the thing over Dream's mouth and Dream had just stood there and let it happen as if it was *normal*).

Dream was falling apart right in front of their eyes and there was nothing they could do.

Karl was crying, slumped back against his own wall. George and him had stopped trying to fight the restrains some time ago, the chains only cutting further into flesh the more they struggled, but Sapnap hadn't giving up yet, trashing against the chains like a wild animal, screaming for Dream to stop.

But Dream didn't seem to hear them. He had closed his eyes, face contorted into a twisted mockery of peace and tranquility. Karl had to physically turn away, dread and terror spreading through his body, feeling like a punch to his guts.

Dream stopped after a while, blood matting his hair and painting his skin red. Sluggishly he let go of the wall, trying to push himself onto shaky legs but they collapsed under his weight and he tumbled to the ground. His mind was too slow to catch him and his shoulder took most of the impact.

Karl just wished he would stop, give his battered body some rest but Dream had always been stubborn and so Karl could do nothing but watch him drag himself across the obsidian floor, hands scarping against the rough surface, splitting open his palms.

When Dream finally managed to reach Karl, he was panting and gasping heavily for air, eyes screwed shut. After what felt like infinity and a little bit more, they fluttered open, meeting Karl's. They were fogged over, unfocused, but Dream seemingly recognized him anyway. He reached into one of his pockets of his pants, struggling to get his numb fingers to work. He let out a jubilant huff when his hand finally found what he was looking for, arms coming up and one of his hands grasping thick air before it found Karl's.

Something soft touched the inside of his palm and he looked at Dream's hand that was gripping his, pressing something green and black into his grasp.

It was the ribbon he had given Dream when they had visited the village next to Kinoko Kingdom. Only a few weeks had passed since that day but to him it felt like a lifetime ago.

His eyes met Dream's, perplexed and worried, searching for an answer to Dream's confusing action.

Nothing but trust swirled in the dark green as he clumsily brought his hands up, forming signs that Karl didn't know.

"What is he saying?" His voice sounded wrong, small as it bounced off the walls of their cell and he winced, chewing on the inside of his cheek in a nervous attempt to distract and calm himself down.

"He's saying '*Don't want it to get tainted*'," Sapnap choked out. Karl felt his heart being chipped away, little by little and there was nothing he could do.

He tried to give Dream the ribbon back, opening his mouth to tell him to keep it, that it was his and that he could look after it himself until they were out of the prison (because they *would* get out, they had to), but Dream shook his head before any words could come stumbling out of his mouth. Dream's eyebrows were knitted together. He looked determent, certain of his decision despite the daze in his eyes as he pushed the ribbon further into Karl's palm.

Karl didn't need a translator to understand his next words – the pleading look was enough.

'Take care of it. Please.'

Karl's heart shattered into a million pieces as his fingers closed around the ribbon, throat tightening and threatening to choke him.

Relief washed over Dream's features before exhaustion's caught up to him and he collapse against Karl's shoulder, his breath painfully scraping and rattling against his chest as he finally allowed himself to rest.

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Still in prison :)

TW: Torture, blood, manipulation, gaslighting

Chapter Notes

Fun fact: Dream ending up in prison again wasn't originally planned when I started mapping out the plot for this fanfic a few months ago. But then I was like "yk what would be great? To make Dream suffer even more." :D

Break is over and school started again which means more exams and my life is going downhill, even more than it already was. But don't worry, I will not take a break from this fanfic or anything. This is my escape from whatever the hell is going on in my life at the moment so I will never stop writing. But the next few updates are probably gonna take a bit longer than usually. But I'm trying my best!

This chapter is very short but the next chapter will be the longest one so far to make up for it. Hope you guys enjoy!

Sapnap felt like Quackity had gone and plunged his hand deep into his chest, slowly twisting and shoving and ripping his heart out.

The deeply rooted betrayal, as well as the anguish and sorrow and confusion that came with it, he had felt all of it before; back when Dream had left him and George behind without looking back. But with Quackity, there was no excuse in the entire world to condone his actions, no egg possessing him and forcing him to torture his own friend.

Sapnap didn't know what was worse – the dizzy swirl of emotions paralyzing his mind and body, the fact that he had to feel it for a second time, or the realization that Dream had kept quiet about all of *this* in a desperate attempt to protect them all from the heartbreak of finding out. It was cruel irony that they were now finding out about it in the worst possible way.

No one had uttered a single word the entire night, everyone too wrapped up in their own heads to hold a conversation. Karl had tried his best to keep Dream awake, too afraid that he had a concussion, and George hadn't looked at any of them since Quackity had left them alone. He was pale and shaken, and Sapnap couldn't blame him because he was fairly certain he looked the same.

He tried not to look over to where Dream was draped over Karl's shoulder. The image of his bloody head was enough to make his stomach churn as he was forcefully reminded of the utter helplessness he'd felt watching Dream hurt himself. His protective side was screaming and clawing at his insides, longing to pull Dream to his chest to hold him and never let him go again.

But he couldn't. He was chained to the wall and rendered useless. He'd never been this hopeless in

his entire life, and the feeling was carving a hole in his chest, making him suffocate on a type of pain he'd never felt before.

The small flicker of hope that Quackity wouldn't come back died as the clicking of red stone mechanics echoed around the room as the lava was lowered. Dream heard them first, jerking upright and scrambling to the middle of the cell, swaying and almost falling over his own trembling legs. It took Sapnap a few seconds to comprehend what his friend was trying to do – that he was standing in front of them to protect them from Quackity.

There was a new harshness behind Quackity's every footstep as he stepped into the cell. He didn't waste time, roughly grabbing Dream's hair and pulling something out of his pocket. It was a metal collar and Sapnap saw Dream's eyes widen, hands clenching into fists before relaxing. He tipped his head back a bit, giving Quackity room to remove the leather collar around his neck and replace it with the metal one.

It made Sapnap sick, watching Dream give in and become so pliant under Quackity's hands, and he could feel the rage punching against his rib cage, demanding to be let out.

Quackity just smirked, letting go of Dream who crashed onto the ground without anyone holding him up. A quiet groan escaped him as he tried to get his legs back under him but Quackity was quicker, snatching another item out of his pocket and pressing down on it.

A shudder went through Dream, the only warning he got before his body went rigid and started seizing up. He fell onto his back, convulsing and trashing around as the electricity of the shock collar surged through his bones.

The stale air filled with soft humming and choked off screams.

Sapnap bit down hard on his lip until his mouth filled up with copper, washing away the bitter taste of bile. He wanted to look away, to avert his eyes from Dream's twitching and whimpering form, but he felt frozen in place, forced to watch his best friend be tortured at the hands of his past lover.

It felt like a nightmare – he wished it was a nightmare because if it was then he would wake up eventually. He would wake up and cuddle with Karl until the terror of the horrifying dream was nothing more than an unsettling buzz in his flesh.

But this wasn't a nightmare, and there was no way to escape the situation.

Quackity towered over Dream, eyes dark as he watched Dream's seizing form. He let agonizing minutes pass by before turning the shock collar off again, keeping his gaze on Dream's body even after he stopped twitching and sunk limply against the obsidian.

Sapnap tried to find something familiar in the darkness of Quackity eyes, anything that told him that his lover was still in there somewhere but all he could find was freezing coldness and bottomless anger. It looked so foreign on Quackity's face and Sapnap had to look away before the dread in his stomach could spread even further.

His gaze fell upon Karl and George. The former was biting down on his lip to keep sobs from spilling out, eyes wide and glassy with desperation and shock. George's face was contorted into a mask, unreadable and apathetically but Sapnap could see his hands trembling by his side, the quiver in his lips.

Quackity finally pulled away from Dream, only to bend over the bag he'd brought with him, yanking out several small knives before returning to Dream's side and kneeling down beside him.

Dream's eyes were squeezed shut, painful wheezing and gasping falling through the air-holes in his muzzle. His whole body was shaking, even now that the collar was turned off. His body tensed up when he sensed Quackity near him.

His eyes fluttered open. A spark of something akin spite flashed up and Sarnap wanted to scream and cry of happiness because Dream was still there, somewhere under the clouded gaze and lowered head. His best friend, Dream, who was stubborn and strong and never gave up.

But Quackity had seen it too and his face twisted into a snarl. With a swift motion the first knife buried itself in Dream's thigh. The scream that followed was strangled and muffled but echoed through the small room nonetheless. Quackity's eyes shimmered with anger, "You know the rules, Dream. Be quiet."

He grabbed the collar, pulling Dream a few inches away from the ground before letting him go. Sarnap winces as Dream's head hit the ground with a thud.

For a moment, Dream's eyes fluttered to the side, somehow finding Sarnap's. They were clouded, drooping with pain and exhaustion and the concussion, rolling up in his head occasionally before Dream forced them back. He was barely holding onto consciousness. He looked so tired and Sarnap almost wished he would give in and pass out but he knew that was not an option with the dried blood sticking to the side of his face.

Quackity lifted another one of the knives, dragging it over Dream's collarbone up to his shoulder and then down to his arm. Blood welled up and soaked through the hoodie he was wearing, already torn from the previous day. Dream let out a strained hiss. "You know, I was so angry when Techno left us, and then I come back a week later only to find you gone as well. Can you imagine how I was feeling in that moment?"

Quackity didn't wait for an answer – it wasn't like he would've gotten one, anyway – burying the sharp point of the blade into Dream's shoulder, the knife easily cutting deep into the skin and despite knowing better, Sarnap threw himself against his restraints. It didn't do anything except scrape his wrists raw.

"Everyone thinks you are dead but I didn't give up. I wasted *months* trying to find you. But now," Quackity smiled, sickeningly sweet. "Now, I've finally found you. We should make up for all that lost time, don't you think?"

Dream's eyes widened slightly and he tried to move away when Quackity dug a new knife into the spider bite at his side, but he was too delirious from the head wound and other injuries and too slow to pull away in time. The guttural scream being ripped from Dream's throat only spurred Quackity on to use more force to cut into him.

Sarnap felt like his insides were being ripped apart. To his left, George began to fight against his shackles as well, staring Quackity down. If looks could kill, Quackity would be a dead man by now.

"Quackity, please," Karl cried out as Quackity raised another knife to the junction of Dream's throat where the collar gave away to bare and untouched skin. "Please, just stop. What you're doing to Dream isn't just hurting him but us, too." It was a low blow, a weak attempt to stop him, but they were running out of opportunities and seeing the way Dream was slumping into the ground, head loosely lolling to the side, Sarnap doubted they had much time left.

To their surprise, Quackity paused. He turned around, eyeing them up and down before barking out a hollow laugh. "Don't. You guy's left *me*. And now you expect me to be nice to you? To have

mercy?”

Confused, Karl paused, knitting his brows together and glancing over to Sapnap through tear hazed eyes. “What are you talking about, Quackity?”

“Oh, don’t play dumb,” Quackity growled, rolling the handle of the knife loosely around in his palm. “Did you ever stop, for just a moment, and think about how I must’ve felt? You guy’s left me and the next thing I know, my best friends, my *lovers*, were living in this nation called Kinoko Kingdom and didn’t even think about telling me.”

“Quackity, you left *us*!” Sapnap’s voice broke but he pushed through clenched teeth and shaky hands, forcing out the heated words before they could burn his throat like acid. “You just vanished without telling us and we waited for you, but you never showed up again. We waited and waited but you didn’t come back and there was no place for us on the Greater SMP anymore, so we went and we built Kinoko Kingdom-”

“Exactly,” Quackity cut in. “You left and you built a whole Kingdom without me.”

“Because you did it first!” Sapnap screamed. “You left first! At least we put posters all around the Greater SMP in hopes for you to see them and come find us. We didn’t know where you were and we couldn’t stay in our old home. We needed a place to go.”

“Las Nevadas *was* supposed to be our new home! If you would’ve waited for just a bit longer.”

Disbelief and fury set Sapnap’s veins aflame and he had the sudden urge to rip his hair out, not knowing where to go with all the anger building up inside him. “We did! We waited for so long. Why didn’t you just tell us?”

“It was supposed to be a surprise.”

“We thought you left us, Quackity,” Karl said, voice laced with desperation as he tried to reason with the man in front of him. “We thought you didn’t want us anymore.”

“Well, just think about how I must have felt like, then.” With that, he turned back to Dream, the grasp on the knife tightening ever so slightly. Sapnap could almost feel the anger radiating off of him as he pressed the knife down, slowly cutting into Dream’s throat who tried to move away but it only drove the blade further into his skin. He choked, crimson spluttering out of the air-holes in the muzzle and a new wave of terror captured Sapnap’s heart.

Quackity stopped pushing down for a moment, leaning over and whispering something into Dream’s ear. Sapnap had to strain his ears to catch what he was saying, “Do you hear that? Do you *see* that. You manipulated them into believing your stupid, little story about the egg, into trusting you again.” Dream started frantically shaking his head, accidentally throwing himself into the blade that was still against his throat.

Quackity’s face pulled into a snarl, “Are you proud of yourself? They think what I’m doing is wrong. You took away my friends, my *lovers*. You selfish bastard.”

He yanked his arm up, the blade of the knife turned down, hovering above Dream’s body like the shadow of a guillotine.

Dream stared up at him, a foreign emotion glinting in his eyes before he went lax in defeat. Sapnap had never felt so frightened, so scared for his best friend. A few months ago he’d been ready to take Dream’s last live – now he would fall to his knees and pray to the Prime Gods to let his friend live through one more day.

Just before Quackity's knife could come plunging down, a dark voice pierced through the thickness of the air, stopping Quackity dead in his tracks.

“Step away, Quackity.”

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Rescue?

TW: blood, referencing abuse and torture, (scars)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Technoblade and Philza Minecraft appeared like blazing fire and a midnight storm, ready to burn the whole world down.

Before Karl could even process what was going on, an enderpearl shattered at Quackity's feet and in a swirl of red and black, Technoblade was in front of him. His netherite sword was already drawn, thrusting the handle against Quackity's throat without mercy and shoving him away from Dream's cowering form. His expression didn't even do as much as twitch when Quackity started to splutter, hands coming up to keep the sword away from his throat. Technoblade was already a step ahead, pulling the sword away to kick him into his stomach.

"The audacity," Technoblade growled, his dark voice bouncing off the walls of the small cell. His red cloak fluttered around his body like the crimson wings of a fallen angel that sought revenge. "The *fucking* audacity you have, you bastard."

Karl jumped when someone touched his arm, wide eyes darting away from the two fighting men. Philza was in front of him, quickly cutting through the chains binding him. The ease in which the sword cut through the iron told Karl the enchantment without having to look at the flame symbol carved into the wood of the handle.

"Check up on Dream, I'll free the others." Philza gave him a small smile before moving on to Sapnap and George.

Karl's legs almost gave out when he tried to walk. Stumbling over to Dream, he lowered himself down to his knees, hands hovering over his friend's battered body without touching anything, too scared to hurt him even more. The knives were still deeply buried in his body, carving a hole into his leg and shoulder. Red lines dragged themselves across his flesh, over his collarbone, across his neck and down his arm. Blood was soaking half of his face, mixing with dirt and sweat and making his hair stick to his forehead.

Most of the injuries were going to scar. Karl closed his eyes for a moment, breathing through the dread etching through his stomach. Dream's eyes were still open, despite the agony shimmering in them, partially dulled by the exhaustion and concussion. Save for the tremors racking his body, he was completely limp, chest shaking under the strain of raising and falling. There was a rattle every time he breathed in and out, pained moans being punched out of his throat by the smallest movements. Karl's concern only grew.

Gods, there was so much blood.

He opted to take off the muzzle and collar first, blindly throwing them behind him. He couldn't stop the satisfied smile when he heard the sizzling of lava as the items were burned to nothing but ash and dust.

"Dream!" George fell down next to Karl, voice scratchy and rough with fear. Sapnap was right behind him, a gaze that was filled with worry and concern trained on his friend as one of George's hands found Dream's slack wrist, fingers digging into the pulse point. "Dream, can you hear me?"

Dream's eyes never left the ceiling of the prison, dark green clouded and unfocused without acknowledging anything happening around him.

"I have a few healing potions with me," Philza said, gently nudging Karl and George to the side to get a better access to Dream. "Should be enough to keep him stable until we're out of here." Swiftly, he pulled out a bottle from the pocket of his cloak. The pink substance sloshed against the glass as he brought it up to Dream's parted lips. He lifted the younger man's head up slightly, carefully feeding him the potion without making him choke on the liquid.

They couldn't give him too much or else he would just throw it back up, but it was enough to chase away a bit of the fog over Dream's eyes.

"Dream?"

"G'rage?" It wasn't much, the name slurred and letters jumbled together, voice weak and hoarse, but it helped unwind at least a tad of the knot in Karl's chest. He felt a heavy tide of relief wash over him because although Dream was not okay – not in the slightest – his friends were here by his side now, without chains or shackles holding them back and they would help him; they would help him pick up the pieces that Quackity had shattered out of his broken form yet again.

Next to him, George's shoulders slumped, hand coming up to push a strand out of Dream's eyes, wiping away a bit of the blood covering his skin.

"This is really touching, but I think we have a few more... eh... urgent matters at hand right now?" Technoblade interrupted them. He had Quackity pinned to the wall, the tip of his sword ready to slice through flesh. Karl could see Technoblade's fingers twitch, ready to execute the final blow. The angel of revenge had scented blood, and he was ready to leave this place with bodies at his heels.

But he held back, eyes trained on Philza. "What should I do with him?"

"Don't kill him." Karl's head snapped around, eyes locking onto Sapnap. He was standing behind Philza, one hand absently rubbing his raw wrists. His face was expressionless as he looked over Quackity's trembling form. "You can..." he stopped, looking at Philza. "Can you guys go ahead and make sure Dream gets out of here as fast as possible? We just... Karl and I need a moment alone with him."

Hesitantly, Philza nodded. Technoblade threw Quackity one last glare, eyes sharp and shoulders stiff. For a second, Karl was convinced he would change his mind and decapitate the man right then and there. But Philza stopped him, expression softening as he called Technoblade's name.

Technoblade drew in a deep breath. His eyes darted down to Dream and the pool of blood straining the crying obsidian. Something shifted in Technoblade's stance as he pulled his sword away, giving Quackity one last punch to the stomach before retreating.

Sapnap, George, and Karl stood up, making space for Technoblade to lower himself to the ground

next to Dream's body. There was a moment of silence before Dream recognized the person in front of him. There were no words to describe the emotions that passed over his face as his eyes finally managed to focus long enough to take in Technoblade. It was far more colossal than disbelief or relief. Karl only knew a sliver of their relationship from what Dream had told them about his time with Technoblade in prison, but from the way Technoblade lowered his head, connecting Dream's forehead with his own and muttering something to the fallen warrior that was too quiet for any other to understand, Karl knew that they shared something special; a bond reaped out of debris and rubble of a past scarred by the same tyrant.

It felt wrong to watch Technoblade's eyes soften when they found Dream's clouded ones, far too personal and intimate.

Technoblade said something under his breath that was followed by a nod from Dream, before the Piglin Hybrid carefully holstered Dream into his arms, gently and cautious of his injuries pressing him against his chest.

"Let's get out of here," Philza said, smashing two potions to the ground, one for him, Dream, George and Technoblade and the other one for Karl and Sapnap. The glass split on the obsidian, gun powder making the shards dissolve into the stale air before it could cut into skin. The magma cream in the Fire-Resistance-potion itched on Karl's skin, an uncomfortable warmth spreading over his body, but it was a small price to pay to not be burned by the lava.

Silently, he stood back and watched as Technoblade was swallowed by the veil of lava, the potion lingering on his skin protecting him from a painful death. George followed right behind Philza, throwing Karl and Sapnap one last glance before leaving them alone with Quackity.

The second they were alone, Sapnap moved forward. Karl didn't have time to hold him back – and he didn't think he wanted to, not after everything that had happened. With quick strides, Sapnap was in front of Quackity's kneeling form, stripped of his armor and items. The faint glow of the lava illuminated the scar carved into his face. Sapnap didn't waste any time, bending down and gripping the collar of Quackity's shirt harshly, pulling him to his feet.

"You motherfucker." All the pent up anger and frustration and desperation was finally boiling over and Sapnap seemed to be tired of having to hold back. The first punch against Quackity's jaw made him wince, the second against his nose ripped out a scream. Something broke under Sapnap's fist, the sickening crack echoing through the cell, but Sapnap didn't stop. "Why did you do it? Tell me, you fucking bastard! Tell me! He was your friend, too!"

Quackity coughed weakly, spitting out some of the blood that had ran down from his nose into his mouth before trying to speak up, voice shaky. "He's a monster. All I did was try to protect you."

"Then why did you lock us up?" Sapnap shouted, shoving the other man against the rough obsidian wall. Karl couldn't do anything but stand and watch, legs feeling frozen in place.

"Because you were being irrational and protecting Dream. He deserves to be here, and you know that! At the end of the day, you were one of the people that voted for Dream to be put into Pandora's Vault."

His words made Sapnap flinch, body going rigid. "And that was a horrible mistake. We already told you that. And we never agreed to-" His voice broke, forcing him to an abrupt stop and he cleared his voice. "To torturing Dream."

Quackity let out a sharp chuckle that drove a dagger into Karl's heart, his mouth contorted into a smirk, blood strained teeth glimmering in the darkness. "A mutt only learns through pain. Isn't my

fault.”

It hit Karl, then and there, that no matter what they said, no matter how hard they tried, they wouldn't be able to get him to understand. It was a bitter realization, one that took Karl's breath away and twisted the dagger in his heart even deeper.

“Quackity.”

Quackity snarled, “Go on, then. Leave me again. Apparently that's the only thing you know how to do.”

“We never stopped loving you, Quackity.”

There was a moment of clarity, Karl thought. A split second where he looked into his eyes and saw a glimpse of an old memory, of their lover – how he used to be. But before Karl could reach out and grasp for it, it was gone, swallowed by a shadow of pitiful anger.

“Then why are you leaving me behind again?”

Karl didn't know where Sappnap had gotten the knife from, if he'd picked it up from the ground, earlier when Technoblade had disarmed Quackity or if Technoblade had given it to him, but in the end it didn't matter. It was quick, it was painless and Karl would forever hate himself for wishing it would've taken longer. The blood gushed out, drenching the floor. It was the only thing left behind when Quackity's body crumbled to ash, despawing off to the void where he would stay for a while, cold seeping into his soul and clinging to his very being until the server decided it was time to send him back. Karl didn't need to check to know that Sappnap had taken a canon life.

He didn't even get to say goodbye.

His entire life, Technoblade had only ever truly cared about one person. It was all he needed; one friend, one bond for eternity. It had made things easier, not letting people near his heart and keeping up the cold facade of a heartless monster.

He had given the universe two chances, had pushed away the prejudices and insecurities and fears of attachment and had let someone else in that wasn't Phil. The first time it had ended with blood straining the craters of what once used to be Manberg. And despite the deeply carved betrayal he had done it once more, had given Tommy shelter and food and supplies, had protected him against his abuser and kept him safe. Only for Tommy to switch sides and leave him alone again.

On that day, feeling the shadows of traitors loom over his shoulder, he had promised himself to never open his heart again, to keep it hidden from the knives of the people he once believed were his friends.

And then he had met Dream.

Dream had been a raw force, hot headed and confident, a smug smirk always audible to Techno despite the mask keeping prying eyes away from his face. His cockiness had been overwhelming at times, the loud and almost mocking behavior annoying to deal with but Techno had recognized a worthy opponent when he saw one. There had been a fire behind Dream's every move and swing of his axe, something intriguing in his swift strength and powerful strikes.

The first time he'd officially met him was in the dust of an arena, the handle of a sword in his grasp and the adrenaline of a good fight lighting up his veins. That day, they'd parted ways with matching grins and a flaming determination to compete against their newly found rival again.

They weren't meant to work out, to be more than just two strangers with a collective respect for each others strength and ability to make the world bow to their feet. Two Gods could be mutual, but never friends. At least he had thought so, until the day he'd learned that even Gods could bleed.

Dream had been right. When Techno had first entered the prison they hadn't been friends; acquaintances maybe, warriors sharing the same enemy, but not friends. For Techno, the word had always left an acid taste on his tongue, burning the roof of his mouth.

Techno had tried his best to keep his heart locked away, screaming at it not to get hurt again, had kept secrets from Dream even in prison despite the guilt tugging at his chest. But oh, how wrong he'd been for thinking that he could keep someone as resilient and stubborn as Dream away. Dream was sneaky and deft and Techno hadn't even realized it when he had slowly crawled his way into his heart.

Sitting on the cold floor of the prison, obsidian cutting into the palms of their hands and blood sticking to their ripped flesh, fate had welted their lives and destinies together – more forced than voluntarily – but Techno had stayed by Dream's side after the escape. That had been him and him alone. Out of his free will he had nursed the other back to health, had pulled him back to his feet whenever he stumbled or fell, and had read him *The Art of War* out loud until his voice was hoarse and mouth dry.

Because somewhere along the way, they had become friends. A new bond had formed, right next to Philza's, shimmering dark green like a cold lake in a forest, tight and strong.

The first few weeks after the escape had been hard. They'd had to move, build a new cabin farther away, too scared that Quackity would come and find them. Phil had come with them, making sure Techno didn't abandon his own health while taking care of Dream. They had managed it, somehow, just the three of them. They had learned how to coax the other out of a panic attack, to wake them out of a nasty nightmare and to avoid any type of meat when the simple smell of cooked flesh was enough to send Dream's mind back into the prison, nose filling up with the scent of smoke and skin feeling like it was set aflame.

Healing had been like tides in the ocean, progress being pushed forward before being pulled back again by every small misstep. But whenever it happened to one of them, the other had been there to hold out a hand and help them back to their feet. Step by step, they had handled life together.

Techno remembered the exact day he had come back from hunting only to find the cabin empty and Dream gone. It had taken the admin hours to convince Techno to go outside, had tried to argue that he wasn't a child and that he could handle being alone for a while. Returning to absolute silence and a cold home had sent hot panic through Techno's body. For a moment he'd thought Quackity had come back and taken Dream away again.

It had taken everything in him and a lot of convincing from Phil to stop him from running back out again and cutting every tree down, turning every rock over, and digging up all of the snow in his desperate attempt to find Dream. Phil had called him an idiot, a fool controlled by his emotions, that he wasn't thinking straight with the panic still infesting his brain, making him muddled and dazed. It wouldn't help Dream if Techno got lost in the tundra and froze to death. It'd been a cold night, the beginning of a snow storm threatening to overtake the dark night sky.

They had found the letter after they'd calmed down, messy sentences hurriedly scribbled on

crinkled paper. *'I'm sorry,'* Dream had written. *'Sorry for being a burden, for wasting space and time and being so fucked up. For waking you up every night and making you take care of me because I just can't seem to move on from something that happened months ago.'* Techno's vision had almost been too blurry to continue reading. *'I only have one more wish, one more request. Don't come looking for me, please. I will be long gone by the time you find this letter. It's better this way, for both me and you. I'm sorry, Tech.'*

Techno had almost rushed out the door a second time that night, but Phil had once again stopped him. With a gentle but firm hand on his shoulder he'd pushed him onto the couch and had called Steve over to stay by Techno's side while he stepped up to the window and sent one of his crows out. The black bird had let out a raspy croak before swinging itself up into the sky and with one last flap of its big wings, it'd been gone.

It had come back two days later, the whisper of a place with mushrooms as tall as buildings and the names of three men tumbling out of the birds beak. Dream was in Kinoko Kingdom.

Phil hadn't seemed too concerned, waving Techno off when he tried to convince him to let him go and get Dream back. It had made Techno angry, gut churning when he'd thought about Sappnap's promise and Dream's current whereabouts. There was no way Dream was safe.

But Phil had shook his head, asking him to wait for a few more days, just to see what would happen. Phil's crows had hovered over Kinoko Kingdom like a storm cloud, always observing and giving them updates and information on how Dream was doing. The daily confirmation that Dream was doing as good as he could in his current situation had chased at least a little bit of the worry away but it hadn't stopped the nervousness and anxiety from scratching against his chest.

"He needs this," Phil had said to him one night when Techno didn't want to stop pacing around the living room. *"He would have never been able to properly heal if he had stayed away from his friends any longer. The guilt had eaten away at him and you know it. Give him the opportunity to fix things. Trust me on this, Techno."*

It had been going good. Until a murder of crows had frantically knocked against their window, asking to be let in. Plunging their living room into a clout of black feathers, they had rushed the words out and just like that Techno's world had fallen apart.

Quackity had Dream.

Two days. It had taken two days to plan everything. After the second sun crawled back down the horizon, Techno hadn't been able to hold back any longer. Two days wasn't a long time, but in this moment, holding Dream's almost limp body in his arms, it might have been a small eternity.

Techno tightened his grip on Dream, cradling him further against his chest. He could feel Dream's head tilt to the side, hiding in the crook of his neck. He was still breathing, small puffs of air hitting the Piglin's collarbone, but Techno could feel blood seeping into his shirt and running down his arms that were protectively slung around the injured man. He had given him his cloak to protect him from the harsh wind coming from north when they stepped out of the prison.

He wanted to call Dream's name, to show him that they were finally outside, no longer in Pandora's Vault but Dream didn't seem to be lucid enough to understand what was going on.

If he could, he would burn down the whole prison.

If Phil and Sappnap hadn't stopped him earlier, he would've buried the tip of his sword into Quackity's body without any traces of hesitation or remorse. He wished they had let him, wished

that Dream had been coherent enough to hold the weapon with him. They deserved it, after everything that had happened. It sounded like a cruel joke of the universe, some twisted irony that they weren't even allowed to take revenge and get at least a semblance of peace.

They ran into Sam when they were already a few chunks away from the prison. Earlier, Phil and him had taken him by surprise, slicing his head off with ease before hurrying to the cell. Seeing the warden back on his feet, still swaying slightly from the recent respawn but otherwise unaffected, gave away that his death hadn't been enough to take a canon life.

Disappointment flared up and Techno was about to hand Dream to Phil so he could meet Sam in the middle and go for another live but George stopped him.

"I got this." Techno wanted to argue, the voices in his head still chanting for blood but the determination and desperation in George's eyes stopped him. He needed this, Techno realized. Needed to feel useful after helplessly having to watch Dream getting tortured for two days. Techno couldn't argue against his request because he knew exactly how George felt, had experienced it first hand. And so he stepped back and gave George a nod. It didn't stop him from pinning Sam in place with his eyes, however, a silent warning not to try anything stupid.

He saw relief wash away the frown as George took a deep breath, turning around to where the warden was slowly creeping closer, one hand holding a sword, the other tightly gripping his trident.

"Sam." George's tone was unreadable, expression stoic as he faced his old friend. "Why did you do it?"

"Because Dream is a danger to these lands. It's my duty as the warden of the prison to keep all the prisoners secured and locked away."

George stayed quiet for a few seconds, eyes flickering down to the ground where the soil under his feet was loosened up by the rain shower that had happened since his stay in Pandora's Vault. He seemed to search for the right words, mouth opening without any words falling out until he finally spoke up again, head turning back up to Sam. "You know, he was possessed by the egg. He didn't even do the things you locked him up for voluntarily."

In Techno's arms, Dream restlessly shifted around, head tilting away from him and he could feel his body going rigid. He furrowed his brows and glanced down. Dream's eyes were looking somewhere into the distance, glassy and unfocused. Techno tightened his grip on his friend.

In front of him, Sam hesitated for a split moment, eyes darting over George's face as if he was trying to find a lie behind George's words. "How do you know for sure? He could be lying."

"Not this time. Trust me, Sam. He didn't even want to believe it either, at first."

"Even if it's true, no one would believe him. He lied too many times. No one trusts him anymore."

George sighed, "I know." He turned around to Techno, gaze resting on Dream. The admin had turned his head again, face now hidden in Techno's neck. The blood sticking to his skin and clothes looked almost like black tar in the darkness of the night. "We don't want to stay here. We'll take Dream and go far, far away. We'll never bother you again if you just let us be. He isn't a threat anymore, I promise. Just let us go."

If Techno didn't know better he would say Sam face changed into an almost somber expression as he studied George. "I can't," he muttered. "I can't let you go, and you know that."

"I suppose you can't. I'm sorry, too." George didn't give Sam any time to react, closing his eyes and reaching out to the server. Techno could feel the dirt beneath him thrum with life as the wind picked up around them. There was a pause, where everything came to a standstill before the ground reared up, the server following George's request with a playful ease. Techno had seen it before, in one of Phil's world, the way the world bend to the every will of the admin. In silent astonishment he watched Sam getting thrown back from the force of the rebelling earth. There was a loud crack as Wardens body landed on his back. It didn't take long for him to despawn.

"That was cool," Techno said, eyes still fixated on the patch of grass Sam had been lying on a few seconds ago.

Phil nudged him forward, bringing his focus back on the situation at hand. "We should hurry up. Dream is losing a lot of blood."

Techno nodded. They couldn't walk too fast, having to make sure that Sapnap and Karl could catch up. It didn't take long until two shadows approached them. George almost called out to the server again, thinking Sam had come back, before the familiar voices of Sapnap and Karl reached their ears. They continued walking in complete silence, none of them having the energy nor the need to talk.

It was deep into the night when they finally reached the tundra. It was quiet, the snow around them swallowing every sound save the crunch of their footsteps. It was a clear night, the clouds having made space for the polar lights to flare up the sky. Techno kept a bit of a distance from the others, never once loosening his hold on Dream even when his arms started to ache from the weight. He was convinced Dream had passed out until he looked down to see his face turned up to the sky.

"Tech," he whispered, eyes bright with awe and childish wonder. "They're out again."

"I can see it, Smiley," Techno smiled, eyes following Dream's gaze up to the dark sky, lit by a fire of green and purple

"It's so beautiful. I wish I didn't break it."

Techno's face fell, "What do you mean?"

"All this. I wish I never left. M'sorry for leaving, Tech."

"Don't even start, Dream," Techno warned softly, looking back down to make sure that the cloak was still wrapped around his friend, keeping the icy temperature at bay. "Yes, you were an idiot to think that you were a burden and needed to leave. But I'm not mad at you. I'm just glad I'm back at your side, because apparently you can't even be apart from me for more than a month before getting into trouble."

A smile ghosted across Dream's lips, but Techno could see the exhaustion clear on his face. His eyelids began to droop.

"Hey," Techno mumbled, trying to keep away the worry nagging at his tone. "You still with me, Smiley?"

He didn't get an answer, not a verbal one anyway. There was a light tapping against his chest, one, two times and Techno tilted his head down to see Dream's fingers buried into his shirt. Two taps, that was all Techno needed to shift his focus back up to path ahead.

They reached Techno's cabin as Apollo began to look over the tree tops, drenching the surroundings in a warm, golden light and making the snow glimmer like diamonds spilled over the earth.

Phil was quick to lead Techno to the couch where he gently lay Dream down onto the soft cushions. Dream was barely lucid at this point, eyes half lidded and slurring his words when they tried to get him to talk. His pupils were dilated when they flashed a light by his face, and that was all Phil needed to know to get a bunch of regain and healing potions and start with the head injury.

He worked in silence, completely focused on treating Dream's wounds. The spider bite on his side was a mess, edges of the skin red and angry. Phil's eyes furrowed slightly as he began to clean up the blood that was sluggishly pouring out.

It was a painful procedure and it clawed at Techno that Dream stayed awake for all of it. He had lost too much blood and the concussion made things even worse. But Dream stayed quiet the whole time, not once complaining. Even when Phil began to prod around the spider bite he took to biting his lip until it started bleeding, choking down small whimpers and whines every now and then.

When Phil was finished with treating Dream's wounds, the admin was covered in bandages. For a moment, Techno lost himself in an old memory. He didn't know what he could have done to prevent the past from being repeated, but he should've tried harder. He had promised Dream that day when he had first woken up after the prison escape so many month ago that he would keep him safe, that Dream would never go back to that place ever again.

Technoblade had broken his promise.

"It's bad," Phil said, tiredly leaning against the armrest of the couch, eyes never leaving Dream's limp form. When Phil had first joined the server, he'd been suspicious of Dream, always cautious around him, but although the old man would never admit it, Techno knew Phil had grown fond of the admin over the time of his recovery. "Especially the wound on his side. It'll take a while for him to recover."

Wordlessly, Techno nodded and carried Dream upstairs, to his old room in the attic were he always used to sit on the window sill and watch the snow bunnies hop by. Karl, Sapnap and George followed them, immediately joining Dream in the large bed that was pushed against the left corner of the room, wrapping their arms around Dream's waist and chest, cautious of the new injuries and to not restrict him in his movements.

It didn't take long for them to fall asleep, and Techno was about to leave the room and give the four friends a bit of privacy and space when a small voice called out to him. It was barely above a whisper, but Techno caught it.

"Techno?"

He hummed, turning around to see Dream blink up at him. His eyes were still foggy and the pain was still etched into his face, but at least he didn't look as pale as he had in the prison.

"Can you... Can you stay?" Dream gave him a weak smile. It wasn't much, but to Techno it was everything he needed to lower himself into one of the big armchairs and chase away the last bit of exhaustion, eyes trained on the big window to his left as he kept watch over his fallen friend and made sure that the monsters under his bed wouldn't come back to haunt him again.

Chapter End Notes

Rivals duo my beloved <3 Be ready for more to come ;)

This is the longest chapter so far and I've already been working on the next chapter which will also be very long so quick question: do you guys like longer or shorter chapters more? Because idk if I should change it and break chapter twenty in two seperate chapters. Keep in mind, longer chapters take more time.

Anygay, hope you guys enjoyed this chapter. I promised you there would be Techno content :D

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of the prison

TW: Only really bad coping mechanisms I suppose. If I missed anything let me know!

Chapter Notes

I'm still alive guys!

I'm really sorry about the wait but last week was really stressful because of school and exams and my beta reader was pretty busy as well. And, on top of that, my brain started to be stupid again and criticize everything I do so I'm just not satisfied no matter the result.

But next update is definitely gonna happen in the next few days, dw.

Hope you took care of yourself and are doing good! Enjoy the chapter :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

George woke up to soft rays of sun dancing across his skin. But the warm golden light was not enough to chase away the numbness that settled itself behind his rib cage the moment he opened his eyes. It was a heavy numbness, deeply woven over his heart like barbwire and it took a few seconds for his brain to register why it was there.

Quackity; the prison; *the torture*.

Panic flared up and he shot into an upright position, gaze frantically flickering around the room. His heart only allowed itself to slow down when his eyes locked onto the three figure lying beside him. In their sleep, Karl and Sapnap had shifted impossibly close together, arms and legs intertwined. Karl's head lay in the crook of Sapnap's neck, a tight grip on his lovers hand that didn't loosen even deeply in slumber. George smiled softly.

Then his gaze fell on Dream. The man was on his side, head buried into the pillow. His hair was a mess, he was still pale and had dark bags under his eyes but he was still handsome, still undeniably Dream. He looked peaceful, eyes lightly shut, face slack as he bathed in the calmness and tranquility of sleep, his mind too exhausted to throw him into any nightmares.

George wanted to stay here forever, feel the light that ghosted over his skin and chased down the chills that had dug under his skin ever since the prison and revel in the way Dream's chest rose and fell in steady in- and exhales, a soothing reassurance that he was here, *alive*.

But George grew restless after a few minutes, needed to move and stretch his limbs. Carefully, he detached himself from his friends and the sheets, leaving the comfort of the bed. He shivered when his bare feet hit the cool wooden floor. There was a door to his right, leading out into a hallway that ended in stairs.

His feet made a quiet thump every time he hit a step, the floorboards creaking under his weight. As soon as he reached the bottom of the stairs, voices carried over from a room at the end of a long hallway. Following the noises, George found himself in front of an already open door, the sizzling of a pan and humming and clattering of a fork against porcelain greeting him.

Technoblade was sitting on one of the chairs surrounding a table in the middle of the room. He had his brows knitted together, mustering the food on his plate in front of him with a weary look. To his right, Philza was standing next to the stove, filling the air with delicious smells and painfully reminding George that he hadn't eaten anything in almost three days.

The whole room was filled with light, drenching the furniture golden.

It was bittersweet, he thought, watching the dust dance in the sunlight coming through the window over the kitchen counter. Bittersweet and burning, as memories of long gone days were washed up again; the low humming of Dream's morning voice as he turned over pancakes, Sapnap's giggles and George's screeches as the flour settled all over the floor.

Sometimes, George thought about their old home on the Greater SMP and wondered if it was still there. He hadn't been to the main lands in months, the nostalgia too raw, the pain too deep. Was their house still there? Overgrown by vines and flowers and moss as time had passed on, flourishing under the touch of nature? Or had it withered away for no one had been there to take care of the old wood and carved stone? Had it crumbled away till nothing had remained but a fine trace of what once was and never would be again; something that people came to and marveled at, wisps of old tales clinging to the air surrounding the building – a reminder that nothing could fix a damaged past.

For an endless moment, George stood there, frozen in the door frame, watching Technoblade eat and Phil cook. It was warm and sweet and honeyed and George absorbed it all, in a desperate attempt to get rid of the numb feeling still sitting in the middle of his chest. He wanted to harbor this domestic feeling, wanted to pluck it from the quiet air of Techno's cabin and take it with him.

One day, he wanted to wake up in his own bed, in his own house. He wanted to wake up to the smell of breakfast floating through the hallways, to get out of bed and find Dream standing in the kitchen, smiling when he saw him. He wanted to kiss him and hold him and watch the dust dance through the kitchen together.

Maybe, he thought, in another universe, in another time. But not in this one – not yet, and maybe never.

He cleared his throat, flushing when two pairs of eyes immediately lay upon him, cutting under his skin with intensity. He opened his mouth to speak but pretty quickly he realized there wasn't much he could say. He had never traded more than a few words with either of the two men and now that he had a reason, his mouth was empty of words.

"Hey, mate," Phil said, seemingly sensing his discomfort. "Glad to see you awake and on your feet."

"How," he paused, cleaning his throat for a second time. "How long did I sleep?"

"A whole day."

"A whole-" George's eyes widened, glancing out of the window. Snow upon snow stretched across the land and up to the horizon. Guessing from the sun climbing its way up the sky, it was almost noon.

Phil's face broke out into an amused smile as he turned back around to the stove. "Just because Dream was the only one hurt, doesn't mean you guys didn't need rest, too. You went through a lot."

George absently nodded, eyes still fixated on the way the snow glinted in the golden light. "Thank you," he finally pushed out. "Thank you for...for rescuing us." He brought a hand up to his chest, rubbing his sternum to try and get rid of the dull ache that had spread.

"Of course."

It was absurd. So bizarre, so strange and George doubted his brain had even started to try and process the past few days yet. Or maybe it was just simply refusing, too scared to think about it for too long. "How did you even know where we were?"

"Let's just say, Techno would've probably gone out and torn down the entire server if I hadn't made sure Dream was doing okay the entire time he was over at Kinoko Kingdom," Phil said, amusement mixing into his tone. Techno let out a deep growl from the back of his throat, glaring at Philza from where he was still sitting at the table.

Philza rolled his eyes. "Sorry about him," he apologized to a very confused George, bringing his attention back to the food in the pan in front of him. "He's grumpy because I forced him to take care of himself for once. He hasn't left Dream's side since you guys fell asleep yesterday--"

"You watched us sleep? Kinda weird, dude." George croaked a brow, looking Technoblade up and down who snarled at him, eyes flashing deep red.

"Well, excuse me for being a bit cautious but the last time you guys were alone, you got kidnapped."

George flinched.

"Techno," Philza warned. "I'm really sorry about him. He's just agitated because of what happened to Dream and because I told him he isn't allowed to get back to Dream's side before he hasn't at least had breakfast and, you know, the voices really aren't helping."

George did, in fact, not know. But he didn't say anything, just nodding and silently accepting Philza's invitation to sit down on the table and join the breakfast. It was quiet for a while, George trying his best to ignore the heaviness of Technoblade's gaze while devouring the plate of food Philza had put in front of him.

"How is he?" To George's surprise, it was Technoblade who breached the silence first. He almost missed the sliver of hidden worry in his tone.

George swallowed, putting his fork down. "He uhm, he was still sleeping earlier. But I actually wanted to--" he stopped, hesitation wrapping around his tongue and forcing his mouth shut. He knew telling them would be the right decision, that he needed them to know because him and his friends wouldn't have been able to help Dream without Technoblade and Philza. Albeit, that didn't stop his heart from feeling heavy as he spoke up again, "The head wound he has, it's not from Quackity. He did it to himself."

The silence that followed was thick, almost suffocating. George pushed his plate away, suddenly not hungry anymore. Where had everything gone so wrong for them?

"He harmed himself?" Philza asked carefully. George had always thought of him as withdrawn person, who did his own thing, most of the time not really taking anything too serious no matter the

circumstance. He was a mad man just like Technoblade was and maybe that was the reason why they went centuries hand in hand, a sword in the other. The worry that was chiseled in Philza's face now made him look older, more serious.

George nodded, taking a deep breath before continuing, "He hit his head against the wall. After... Quackity's first visit."

Technoblade muttered something that sounded suspiciously like 'I should've killed him myself', knuckles gripping the edge of the table and turning white under the force.

"Maybe," George said, "It's better if we keep a close eye on him, make sure he doesn't...do anything like that again."

Philza was about to open his mouth when light footsteps cut through the tense atmosphere, the creak of the stairs indicating that someone was coming down. With soft taps of their feet against the floor, the person rounded the corner, stopping in the door frame just like George had done half an hour prior.

"Dream," George breathed out.

The scratches on his neck and collarbone had already scabbed over thanks to the potions Phil had given him yesterday but his other injuries were obviously not healed yet. He was limping, favoring one leg over the other, his left arm awkwardly tucked against his chest and George could see the thick bandages wrapped around his middle even through his clothes. But what George shocked the most was the smile that stretched across split lips. It was lopsided, not quite reaching his eyes as he looked at George. They stayed like this for a few seconds before Dream let his eyes wander around the room, freezing when they landed on Technoblade's.

"Techno?" It was barely above a whisper, voice quiet and scratchy.

Technoblade was on his feet in an instant, chair scraping over the wooden floor as he rushed over to Dream's side before stopping right in front of him. George couldn't name the spiral of emotion they wordlessly exchanged, feeling oddly out of place as he watched Technoblade lean forward and press his forehead against Dream's who raised his hands, desperately clasping the fabric of Technoblade's shirt between his fingers as if the warrior would disappear the moment he let go.

"You're here," Dream mumbled, disbelief heavy in his tone. "You are really here. It wasn't just a dream. You came for me."

Technoblade's hands came up, wrapping around Dream's. "I was always with you. The entire time I was watching over you, I promise. I'm sorry I let him take you again." Never had George heard Technoblade sound so soft, so fond as he spoke and he had to avert his gaze, feeling like he was intruding a private moment.

A silence spread, Technoblade and Dream holding onto each other, quietly mourning over old regrets while George still sat at the table, nervously fidgeting with a splinter on the side of his chair.

There it was again, that bitter jealous feeling blooming up, infesting his thoughts. He tightened his jaw, forcing himself to stay put and pushing down the urge to jump up and drag Dream out of the room, away from Technoblade.

"George?" He looked up. Dream was no longer clinging onto Technoblade. He had come closer to the table, eyes pining him in place, a swirl of concern glinting in the dark shade of green. "Are you

okay?"

George opened his mouth, before closing it again, swallowing down hysteric laughter at the absurdity of the situation. "Seriously?" he asked, rolling his eyes as Dream tilted his head in confusion. "Dream, are you seriously asking if I'm okay? If anything, I should be asking you that question." Then, more hesitantly, he added, "How...how are you?"

For a moment, Dream was quiet, the corner of his mouth twitching and fingers flexing. But the moment passed quickly, a grin spreading across his lips. "I'm good. Thanks for asking, Georgie."

George furrowed his brow, about to dig further but Dream was faster, falling down on one of the chairs next to him, "I'm a little bit hungry though."

An unsettling sensation washed over George, going deep under his skin, seeping into his bones as he watched the smile on Dream's face never fade.

Dream had many unhealthy coping mechanism, even before the prison, back when the war was still fresh, tearing through the lands. But out of every single one of Dream's habits, this one was the worst. George had seen it before, one cold September day when they'd been out exploring the area surrounding the main lands. They had found a village at the foot of mountain circle, slotted into a small valley. Dream had set off a Raid. It had been an accident but George had never forgotten the expression of pure horror and self-hatred on Dream's face as he desperately tried to fight off the waves of attacks.

They had all expected him to crash when they got back home; to have a breakdown the moment the adrenaline ebbed away. But to everyone's surprise, he'd merely let out a deep sigh before turning on the stove, starting to prepare dinner for them without another word.

The next days had passed without any incidents. Dream had acted like his cheerful self, not once mentioning the Raid. It had taken Sapnap and George too long to notice what he was doing – that he'd pushed the whole event so far away from him to the point where he'd completely separated himself from reality to protect himself from the pain and regret. It hadn't worked out and one day, inevitably, he had finally broken down, guilt slowly eating away at his conscience until he hadn't been able to take it anymore. The next weeks had been the worst George had ever experienced.

And now, Dream was doing it all over again. George could tell by the way he effortlessly dodge any questions, keeping up small talk with Philza or trading snarky remarks with Technoblade. And then there was his smile – his stupid smile that shouldn't look so real on his pale face but over the years Dream had mastered the art of acting carefree a tad too well.

"Dream?" George carefully asked, shuddering when Dream's eyes met his. They held a foreign sparkle that looked so wrong, painting a juxtaposition over the red lines of his still not fully healed injuries. "You sure you should be down here? Maybe you should rest some more."

"No," Dream shrugged his shoulders, flashing him a toothy grin. "I'm fine, Gogy. Don't need to worry about me."

George gaze wandered over to Technoblade who was already looking at him with a raised eyebrow, lips turned down. 'This is not good,' the Piglin Hybrid mouthed when Dream was occupied with his breakfast.

Although George hated to admit it, he agreed with Technoblade. This was really, really bad.

Days began to pass slowly and somewhere along the way a new routine formed. For George, Sapnap and Karl a time of mourning had begun; the numbness had faded away, making space for grief to plunge its claws into them. Clinging onto Karl and Sapnap, crying his own sadness and remorse out while comforting his friends at the same time, just made him realize that while they sought the closeness of each other, Dream was alone, stubbornly pushing everything away from him to chase the blissful ignorance that would only be the catalyst to a crushing wave that was ready to swallow him whole.

The anxiety and worry over Dream grew with each day and George didn't know what to do. Because Dream was fine. He allowed George to stay in his room at night, slept on the mattress instead of the floor without any nightmares and talked and laughed with them like nothing ever happened. He was fine but at the same time he wasn't because George knew that Dream was bound to break down soon and he was scared that the longer Dream delayed it the worse it would be in the end.

But Dream was stubborn and every time George asked him if he was okay, he just clenched his jaw, put on a smile that was a little bit too croaked to be genuine and changed the subject.

Another thing George had noticed was Technoblade. The man was almost everywhere Dream was, guarding him like a shadow. George wasn't one to get jealous easily – he really *wasn't* – but he couldn't help the ugly feeling from welling up every time Technoblade stood a bit too close to Dream.

Maybe it was the fact that Dream didn't seem to care when the man slung his shoulder over his shoulder, pulling him closer, or how Technoblade would sometimes place his hand on Dream's waist, claws lightly digging into his hoodie – the fact that Dream didn't violently flinch away from Technoblade's touches. Or maybe it was the way Technoblade sometimes looked at him, *smirking* at him when he leaned his chin on Dream's shoulder.

He didn't like Technoblade, he decided one morning, eyes trained on Dream – or to be more exact, his hands that were wrapped around Technoblade's slightly bigger ones.

Technically, George knew Dream used to be very physically affectionate before the prison, not as much as Karl but still a lot. And he also knew that Dream loved to hold hands when anxiety was nagging at his mind, making him fidgety and restless, that the constant pressure against his palm helped him ground himself in the reality. And he also knew that there was no way Technoblade could steal Dream away from him. But no matter how hard he tried to swallow away the sour feeling at seeing Dream's fingers intertwined with ones that weren't his, it didn't want to go away.

If it wasn't for the jealousy making his skin itch, he would've found it amusing, seeing the famous Technoblade, the cold warrior and heartless monster, cling onto Dream like a drowning man.

“Why are you pouting, Georgie?” George snapped his head around to where Sapnap was leaning against Karl on the couch, one leg casually thrown over the armrest, giving him a knowing grin.

It was nice seeing him downstairs for once. For the last couple of days, Sapnap and Karl had barely left their bed, trying to slowly work through their pain and build a bridge over the chasm Quackity had left behind.

“What?” George tried to play it off but Sapnap's grin only grew bigger, almost shark like.

“Aww, is Gogy jealous?”

“Shut up.” He ignored the snickers that followed his words, turning his attention back to Dream

who'd stood right outside the living room until now, talking to Technoblade in hushed voices.

Their held eye contact for a split moment before Dream averted his eyes, teeth digging into his lip as he stepped into the room. He still looked pale, body stiff from the not fully healed injuries and George could see the dark shadows under his eyes despite the sleep he was apparently getting at night.

"Hey," Dream mumbled, stopping in the middle of the room, hand never leaving Technoblade's.

"What's up?" Karl detached himself from his lover, sitting up straight on the couch. He furrowed his brows, sharing a mildly concerned look with George and Sapnap.

"Well," Dream said, clearing his throat. "I think there is something I need to tell you. It's nothing bad, or at least I think it's not. I mean it could be but--"

"You're rambling again," Technoblade muttered softly. In George's opinion he sounded sickly found. He wrinkled his nose, huffing.

"Right." Dream let out a nervous chuckle, shifting from foot to foot and wincing when he accidentally agitated the still not fully healed spider bite at his side. He tilted a bit to the side before steadying himself, taking a deep breath before continuing, "I wasn't really sure if I hadn't just imagined things because I was pretty out of it at that time – which is why I haven't told you sooner – but basically, when you confronted Sam right after...the escape...I think I saw someone."

The silence that spread was suffocating.

"What?" George's mind scrambled back in time, frantically trying to make sense of Dream's words. Someone had seen them. Someone had seen them *breaking out of prison*.

"It was Bad."

On the couch, Sapnap choked on his own spit, "My dad?"

As far as George knew, Sapnap hadn't seen his father in months. Their relationship had been strained ever since the day Sapnap had found out that the invitation for the Red Banquet had been more of a death sentence than an offer of food and drinks and that Bad had asked him to be there with the intention to make him into a sacrifice. Bad had been possessed by the egg at that time but it had hurt Sapnap nonetheless.

Karl placed a hand on Sapnap's shoulder, a silent solace as he turned to Dream, face twisted in concern. "Do you think he'll try to find us?"

"Doesn't matter," Technoblade spoke up, expression almost bored. "The forest will keep us safe."

George blinked, "The- what?"

Technoblade rolled his eyes. The action irritated George and he bit his tongue to trap a dry comment before it could leave his mouth. George didn't know how, but somehow Dream had caught onto his displeasure and shot him a confused glance. George just shrugged his shoulders, looking away.

"The forest around the cabin. It can be like a maze. Even if Bad does tell someone and they try to track us down, they won't be able to get to us. They won't be able to get through the forest if *she* doesn't want them to." Technoblade had said so many words but he might as well have kept his mouth shut. George huffed, focusing on the dust that the floor boards collected.

“Are you sure?” Karl looked nervous, fingers clenching around the fabric of Sapnap’s hoodie where he had grabbed his arm.

“Yes. We are safe here.”

Safe, George thought, carefully trying out the word, tasting each letter on his tongue. It didn’t feel like it. There was always this eerie feeling, a thought sitting in the back of his brain, whispering warnings and fears in moments of silence and calmness. They were safe here. But one day they would have to leave Technoblade’s cabin. They couldn’t stay here forever. They would have to enter the real world again, step into the center of the chaos and deal with it. It terrified George. The knowledge that they were safe but that it wouldn’t last forever.

“Dream?” George blinked up to where Sapnap was looking at Dream, eyes furrowed. He didn’t get an answer. Dream seemed to be zoned out, staring at a point on the opposite wall. A few seconds passed before Technoblade squeezed Dream’s hand, gently coaxing him back into reality.

“Hm?” Dream mumbled.

“You okay there? You don’t look very stable.”

“What? Oh, yeah I’m fine.” He wasn’t. George could see it too, the way he was slightly swaying from foot to foot, like he was a leaf softly facing a spring breeze. His eyes were droopy and the shadows under his eyes drew a stark contrast to his pale skin. He wasn’t fine. He looked exhausted, worn out, and not even the weak smile could change something about the picture he was painting.

“I’m fine,” Dream repeated, even though no one had claimed otherwise, like he needed to hear the reassurance more than his friends. “I’m doing great.” His voice was shaky, hands trembling in Technoblade’s grasp.

They had barely any time to react when his legs abruptly gave out underneath him and he fell forward.

“Oh fuck,” Sapnap cursed, him and Karl jumping to their feet. Technoblade and George had luckily caught Dream before he could’ve hit the ground. They carefully supported his body as they slowly lowered him to the floor. George’s bones were buzzing from adrenaline and overwhelming worry. One moment Dream had been standing upright, the next he was on the floor of the living room, eyes shut and body limp.

“What happened?” Karl frantically asked. Hands running over Dream’s body, trying to find the reason Dream had collapsed on them.

“Maybe it’s one of his injuries” George bit his lip, lifting Dream’s hoodie to take a look at the bite. His concern grew as he tried to push the bandages aside. But he was only met with a slight red wound, the healing potions from Phil having already started to mend the edges of skin together. He let out a sigh of relief. “It looks fine.”

“Then what is it?”

“Has he been getting enough sleep lately?” Technoblade interrupted their panic. For a second, George swore he saw worry flash through his eyes before he got a better grip on himself, posture straightening as he glanced down at Dream.

“Yeah he-” George paused. “He always goes to bed after me and wakes up before me. I’m not sure if he actually goes to sleep.”

Technoblade snorted, “So he probably hasn’t gotten any sleep in the past few days. Fucking idiot.” He tapped his hand against Dream’s cheek, trying to get a reaction out of him but he was only met with silence. Dream’s eyes stayed shut.

“I’m going to bring him upstairs. He needs a bed.” He lifted Dream into his arms, effortlessly standing up and leaving the living room without waiting for responses.

George let out a shaky breath that he didn’t know he’d been holding. Running a hand through his hair he collapsed onto an armchair next to the big fireplace. His hands had started shaking and he could feel a headache tugging at his temples.

Fuck.

Chapter End Notes

Techno finds it funny to make George jealous and I stand by that. Also protective
Techno my beloved <3

I'd say I'm sorry for what I did to Dream but I really can't considering what's going to
happen next chapter :)

He really can't catch a break

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

It's time for Dream to finally break down.

TW: mentioning abuse and torture, explicit description of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, depressive episode

Chapter Notes

I have one last exam on wednesday so the next upload depends on how quick I'll be able to finish chapter 22 and how busy my beta reader is at the moment. Seeing Dream play crab game with fans and be this active makes me so happy. Glad to know he found something he genuinely likes to the point where he plays it for about 14 hours haha.

(Also, pls make sure to check the TW, this chapter contains some heavy content. Don't forget to take care of yourself <3)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Dream woke up, it was to the feeling of blood sticking to his skin and a blade against his flesh. He jerked up in bed, fighting for air as he choked on his own breath.

“No,” he wheezed, hands coming up to his chest where his heart was throwing itself against his rib cage. “Please no.”

It had been going great. Despite not closing his eyes at night in fear of nightmares and having to pretend to be asleep in front of George, despite feeling like he wasn't in his own body most of the time, only a bystander as he watched a stranger control his limbs – he had been doing fine.

“Stupid,” he muttered, digging his nails into his scalp until it stung. He pressed deeper.

He shouldn't have let his guard down, should've known better. He was weak. He couldn't even go without sleep for more than a few days.

He didn't remember any details about the nightmare. There was only pain, only Quackity consuming every corner of his mind.

Someone touched his arm and he flinched away, almost falling out of the bed. His head snapped up, eyes frantically searching through the room until his eyes met seeping red. Techno was there, talking to him, but the static in his ears drowned every other sound out. He gasped, fingers beginning to scratch across his scalp, tugging at his hair.

He couldn't identify a single emotion he was feeling. Everything blurred together, lines smudging and edges muddling over. His skin felt ablaze, hungry flames gorging every inch of him. The room

was spinning around him, or maybe it was him who was tilting to the right, falling off the bed and onto the ground. Techno was still trying to talk to him but the world felt far away, his vision fuzzy. He let out a scream when Techno reached out a hand, seeing beyond what his eyes could see.

Fingers breaching skin, digging through flesh and touching bones. Icy agony igniting his nerves.

His facade didn't crumble away, it just fell like there had never been a support in the first place, crashing to the ground with loud thunder and Dream could do nothing but watch as the carefully crafted mask of indifference broke into a million pieces in front of him. It had been inevitable, and Dream knew that, but he still wished he'd had more time.

He pushed himself away from Techno, palms and knees dragging across the floor until his back hit the wall. There were footsteps, a door was violently flung open and even more voices spilled into the bedroom. Dream whimpered, ripping at his hair with more force until a few strands came loose.

Electricity burned through his veins, the tight collar cut into his jaw and throat, taking his breath and voice.

And then, everything became quiet.

With widened eyes he looked up to Techno who was standing in the middle of the room. There were other people, voices jumbling together in one worried outcry, but Dream's hazy brain had only enough energy to focus on Techno. He had only seen him so open, so vulnerable with concern clear etched into his face, once. Back when he had come back to get him out of the prison for the first time, guilt eating through his heart like acid for having left Dream behind. The worry made him look younger.

He's pitying you. Because you are weak.

He could feel Quackity's hands everywhere. There was not a single patch of skin that hadn't been tainted by him. He felt too much, hurt too much. He wanted it to stop.

His head forcefully collided with the wall. Instantly, agony flooded his nervous system, taking over his body and thoughts. But it didn't *hurt*. It was so much different than the ache radiating from every cut and scrape Quackity had left behind. It was real, numbing, grounding – blocking everything else out, every overwhelming emotion and painful feeling.

“Dream, stop! Please!” The voices grew more panicked. But Dream didn't stop. For the first time in days, his head was clear, a void of confusing emotions.

A hand cupped the back of his head, taking the blunt force of the next blow. Arms wound around him, trying to stop him from lashing out, but he threw himself against them, seeking the harsh comfort of the wall. The hands tightened, dragging him into the center of the room. There were whispered apologies somewhere between the screams and tussle and tears but Dream ignored them.

They held his head still so he couldn't smash it against the ground or the furniture and so he tried to use his fingernails to claw at his scalp but someone grabbed his wrists, yanking them away and pinning them to his side. They restricted his movements as he fought against them like a wounded animal.

“No,” he chocked, eyes open but not seeing. “Let me go!”

“Dream, please calm down. You're bleeding.” He didn't know who said it, his brain too dazed to recognize his surroundings.

“I can feel him.” A sob bubbled up. Dream felt sticky and gross and pathetic. He felt like dying, his chest trembling under every in- and exhale, his heart rapidly beating against his chest as if it wanted to escape its own confinements. “I can still feel him everywhere. He’s in my thoughts, my dreams. He won and he knows it.”

He won. It was something Dream had desperately tried to shove down, to push far away from himself. The bitter truth that despite him escaping, in the end, he would never be able to get away from Quackity ever again.

He didn’t stop the sobs anymore as they started spilling out over his lips. His cheek were wet, from tears or blood, he didn’t know.

The hands on his head vanished. A strong pair of arms slung itself around him, pulling him against someone’s chest. He didn’t react when the voices called his name, didn’t respond to their attempts to get him to talk. He just simple closed his eyes and let himself go limp. He was exhausted, not the kind of tiredness that came with sleep deprivation, but the drained feeling of having lived too much too fast.

He wasn’t a fighter anymore; the warrior who always carried on, always got back up to his feet after falling. He was losing a part of himself and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

He didn’t even flinch when a warm wash cloth was gently brought to his forehead, water turning pink as it ran down the side of his head. The voices were still speaking, a steady flow of concern and fear.

In another life, another time, he would’ve reached out, would’ve wiped away the tears on his friends cheeks, would’ve tried to wash away the concern off their faces. But fatigue weighed down his arms and so he stayed put, leaning heavier against whoever was behind him, the only reason he was still somewhat upright.

And then the voices stopped and there was only silence that remained, slipping into every crack and crease between the floor boards, filling the spaces between old wood and furniture. It felt heavy, taunting, as if it was laughing at Dream for being so foolish, for thinking that it would all be over, that leaving Pandora’s Vault behind meant being free from Quackity.

The hands weren’t rough anymore, the voices no longer shouting at him. Everything was so much softer all of the sudden, gentle and careful as they held him, tended to his wounds. He didn’t deserve this, he thought, when the sickly sweet scent of a healing potion filled the air.

There were finger in his hair, carefully avoiding the blood and bruises as their brushed through the tangled strands. Dream was sure he had opened the head wound from the prison again, or went so far and caused another one, but he was beyond having the energy to care about the blood sticking to his hair and the side of his head.

He didn’t know how much time passed until someone pulled him to his feet and onto the bed. He wasn’t much help, barely remembering how to move his feet correctly. He felt detached from his body and the world around him. The voices were talking again but they had stopped trying to get him to respond. He heard his name fall a few times but the sounds were too muffled for him to understand anything but a few words.

The healing potion had kicked in by now, slowly beginning to mend the broken flesh. Too bad it wouldn’t weld the pieces of his soul back together too.

There was more talking, a few shuffles and footsteps until it was quiet again. The room was empty

save him and one other person. They wouldn't leave him alone from now on, Dream knew that. One would always be around, making sure he didn't do something stupid again and just the thought of it was enough to tighten his throat. Dream slowly turned his head from where it lay on a soft pillow, blurry green eyes meeting amber.

"Talk to us, Dream." Dream almost burned himself on the flames of Sarnap's desperation as he met his gaze. "Tell us what you need. We want to help you."

They couldn't. Not because Dream didn't want their help, but because not even he knew what was wrong. There were too many emotions pushing against his rib cage, shoving at each other and mashing together till there was no way of telling them apart and his head hurt from the confusing swirl of feelings crashing down on him. He raised his hand to break the tender skin of his forehead again. Pain meant clarity in the sea of chaos. It was the only thing he had left to silence the screams of fear and despair.

But his hand was slapped away before he could claw at the wound. Sarnap looked too young, sitting on the edge of the bed, eyes widened as he reflected all the pain and confusion back to him.

It wasn't fair of Dream to act like this, to break down and let his friends pick up the pieces. He wasn't the only one who'd been in Pandora's Vault, wasn't the only one who'd lost something on the obsidian floor that day. Where a part of himself had slipped from his fingers, Sarnap had cut his own lover from his life.

He wanted to apologize – for what, he didn't know – but no word carried enough weight to breach the silence. Instead, he turned his head away and stared up to the ceiling.

Time moved on and Dream was okay with laying back and letting the world spin without him. First it was Sarnap sitting beside his bed, watching over him; then it was George, Karl, and finally Techno. They took turns, making sure he couldn't harm himself anymore. They tried to get him to talk, to eat a bit of the meal Phil prepared for dinner, but he didn't – couldn't – react.

Something deep inside him, something sick and twisted, laughed when instead of getting in between the sheets beside Dream, George joined Karl and Sarnap in their bed that they had put together with Techno's help a couple of days ago. It was right across Dream's, not the most stable, but enough for temporary use.

Dream could feel George's eyes on him when he sat down on the other bed, could hear him whisper something to Karl and Sarnap but even then, Dream didn't look into his direction. His head felt too heavy to move.

Night came slow and, at the same time, too quickly. The dark blanket of the night wrapped around the house and silence settled in.

Dream's body was sore, the pain from all the injuries Quackity had inflicted upon him still dully buzzing under his skin. His head hurt the most, pounding and hammering despite the healing potion.

He watched the pale moonlight throw shadows across the floor boards and wooden ceiling, his mind spinning stories of a world beyond his; a world where war and destruction were foreign words and the rays of the sun were a pleasant warm instead of a blazing heat.

Maybe, he thought, he wasn't meant to remain whole, destined to crumble under the weight of his

own creation. It was tragically beautiful in the best and worst way; an admin with the golden blood of gods thrumming through his veins, falling apart on the blade of a sword he forged with his own bare hands, so very unmistakably able to bleed – so very undeniably mortal.

A feeling crawled closer. It was slow. Dream had time to observe it, to taste it in the back of his throat and role it over his tongue; to make space for it inside his chest, carefully tucking away the frustration and fear and uncertainty to give the new feeling a place to settle down, to stay.

He could fight, could push it away, but for once he was done fighting. He was too tired to bring up energy, too worn out like the paper of the old books that stood in Techno's highest shelves, abandoned and forgotten, left behind to be covered by dust. He didn't want to fight anymore and so he sat back and watched the feeling overcome him.

It was grief, deep and wide like the ocean. It was his grief and his alone, he realized. To cradle it, to let it cut through his heart and to let it hurt him. It was about mourning a part of him that had been left behind deep in the bowels of the prison.

There was an owl outside the window, sitting on the branches of a tree before stretching out its white wings, letting the wind take it up and up and up into the sky. Oh to be a bird, Dream longed, to soar through midnight sky and be able to reach for the stars.

Dawn came and the day continued like the day before. Dream stayed in bed, hands clenching around the sheets and blending out the world around him while one of his friends kept watch over him. They had stopped trying to get him to speak. This time, when breakfast came and went without Dream eating something, Sapnap left the room without another word, his brows knitted together with a pain, Dream didn't understand.

Dream could see the concern etched into everyone's face, clear in the glances they shared with each other when they thought Dream wasn't looking. He could hear them talk sometimes, could hear them say his name with so much worry it made him sick.

"He isn't eating. I tried everything, but it isn't working."

"He's slowly withering away. Sometimes, I feel like he's already gone. I'm scared of losing him again."

"I don't know what to do anymore, Sap."

Dream felt like a ghost in the cabin that he once used to call his home, doomed to haunt the attic in silent sorrow. He could feel the seams of his soul frizzle out under the strain of existence, too exhausted to stop itself from fading away.

It reminded him of an old myth, rumors about a sickness that could get its teeth on the codes of Admins and eat away at them until the Admins were slowly erased from the world. There wasn't any truth behind the rumors, just meant to infest servers with nothing but sheer terror and fear. But now, feeling the mattress that was a tad too soft on his back, limbs too heavy to move and listening to his friends talk about him like he wasn't even there, he couldn't help but feel a bitter irony. Just that it wasn't a sickness swallowing him from the inside out – just grief, bottomless and cold and all-consuming. And he was too exhausted to stop himself from dissolving into nothing but the layers of dust on the floor of the attic that got thicker with each day.

Fading away like this didn't hurt. It filled his heart with a dull ache when he dared to think about it, but he supposed it was a small price to pay for eternal peace.

He had stopped looking up into the eyes of his friends, not being able to bare the utter helplessness and concern he would find. It wasn't fair – not to them, not to him— but if there was one thing he had learned, it was that life was nothing if not cruel. It would be okay, though. They had already managed to live without him once. It would be easier the second time, wouldn't hurt as much because it wasn't foreign to them anymore.

“Dream.” Techno entered his room on the fourth day, when dawn was settling across the sky, pink and gold spilling across the horizon and illuminating Techno's figure in the soft morning light. He didn't get an answer, like always. “You'll get up now and come downstairs.”

Dream closed his eyes, turning his head up to the ceiling. George, Sapnap and Karl had woken up early today, leaving the room before the first sun rays could creep over the tree tops and had left him alone with the suffocating silence. They had stopped watching over him like a hawk. Maybe because they new he didn't even have the energy left to get up and hurt himself.

It was okay, he told himself. They were starting to learn how to move on without him. The world hadn't stopped turning just because he'd stopped moving.

“That wasn't a question, Dream.” Techno's voice was sharp and Dream took a deep breath when he couldn't find any pity in his tone. It made the friendship with Techno so much easier. They could read each other, knew what the other needed, and knew when it was time to use rough force instead of gentle hands and soft words to get the other back to their feet. “I won't allow you to waste away like this. You and me, we aren't meant to leave this world quietly. Now get your ass off the bed.”

A hand was held out in front of him, hovering in the air. Techno had always been able to meet Dream's stubbornness with clashing force.

“You aren't allowed to give up just yet, nerd.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, this isn't going to be easy but this story will come to an end soon. I already talked about it but originally this story was supposed to only have around 12 chapters and that is clearly not the case anymore lmao. I decided it'd be better to end it before I burn myself out. I will leave a few things open in case I wanna come back and make a prequel about the whole server finding out. Let me know if you'd be interested in that. But first I need to take a break from the story and collect my thoughts and find new ideas.

This will also give me the opportunity to write new things. I'm planning on writing a dreamnotnap fanfic with dream angst and maybe make a OS book where I sometimes just upload random dream-centric oneshots, try and improve my writing skills and maybe even have requests open.

But dw, there will still be about 2 or 3 more chapters before this story comes to an end. Thank you all so much for all the hits and kudos and comments and sticking with me for so long <3

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Techno refuses to let Dream slip away like that.

TW: suicidal thoughts, depressive episode, slight mention of derealization

Chapter Notes

I'm alive!!!!!!!

sorry for the long wait. My beta reader was very busy. But good news (or bad news, depending on how you look at it) the next and final chapter is already written and waiting to be beta read so that will hopefully not take too long until I can upload it. I'm also yet again not satisfied with the results of whatever I write. I can't tell if it's good or not. So I really, really hope this chapter is okay and that you enjoy it. I really can't tell so any kind of feedback is greatly appreciated <3

Another thing, I've been kinda bored in the past week and kind of started writing a (dreamnotnap) dream angst centric fanfic but I don't know if I wanna upload it. It's hard to summarize and I don't wanna say too much yet but basically, if a vampire drinks blood from other magical creatures, it has a drug like effect on both the vampire and their victim. I feel like you guys can piece together the rest ;). It's gonna have three chapters and I already wrote one but like I said, I'm really not sure if it's going to turn out any good and if I even want to upload it in the first place. If anyone's interested, let me now ig :)

When animals and humans are very sick, there is sometimes a time before they leave this world where they have a sudden surge of energy. Out of seemingly nowhere, they will get out of their bed they haven't left in a months, will eat a proper meal for the first time in weeks, and talk and laugh as if the sickness wasn't still running through their veins and eating at their cells. It's a way for the body to rally one last time before giving in to eternal abyss.

Maybe that was the reason why Dream took Techno's hand. A last rebellion against destiny – because maybe, he hadn't resigned himself fully to the end of his story just yet; maybe, deep down, there was still a flicker of something akin to hope that refused to succumb to the defeat that had settled itself in his bones; a gleam that hadn't been squished out yet, barely alive but still *there*.

After being in bed for days, getting up wasn't easy. His bones groaned and creaked under the strain of holding up his body and he swayed to the side, legs almost instantly giving out. Techno simply tightened his grip on his hand. They didn't talk as they made their way down the stairs, and Dream was thankful for the silence. He still couldn't look Techno in the eyes, whether it was because of shame or fear of what he would find in the crimson, he didn't know.

Techno guided him into the kitchen where he finally stopped and turned around to him. "Look, I'm not gonna sugar coat it. Your friends have been worried sick because of the state you've been in for

the last couple of days, and I'm pretty sure Sapnap was on the verge of a panic attack earlier. Which is why Phil practically shoved them out of the house and forced them to get some fresh air, give them time and space to take care of themselves for once." He paused, letting out a deep sigh, before continuing, his tone smudging into something softer. "Don't blame yourself. This situation is messy and ugly but it's not your fault. We're all just... trying to deal with it, in our own ways."

It was that moment, standing the middle of the kitchen and holding eye contact with Techno that he realized how wrong he'd been for saying fading away wouldn't be painful. He could see it on the creases etched into Techno's face that made him look centuries older, the dark shadows under his eyes, and the slouch in his shoulders.

Dream was slipping away, through the cracks of existence while his friends were still here, suffering and grieving. It was selfish of him. The thought took Dream's breath away and he let seconds pass, fighting air in his starving lungs as hot guilt and shame rushed through him. Techno's gaze never left him.

"Sit down." It was a demand, albeit lacking the harshness, the edges dipping into gentleness. Dream complied without any protest.

The moment Techno put a plate of food in front of him, the weight in his stomach that had been a near constant for the last couple of days grew heavier. He felt sick, and Techno's eyes on him didn't help in the slightest. The thought of having to swallow down any of the food made his throat constrict. His hands were shaking as he picked up the fork and knife, letting it hover over a piece of beacon. In a simpler time he would've made a dry joke about the irony in eating meat of a pig in front of Techno, but his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth.

There was the sudden urge to run away – to where, Dream didn't know – to escape something he wouldn't be able to hide from. To maybe go back to his room and hide under the covers like he'd done so many times in the passed couple of days, but Techno's eyes stayed trained on him, cutting under his skin with gentle force. He owed them; after all the pain he caused them, he owed his friends to spend time with them before he left.

Something nudged his leg, making him flinch and drop the cutlery. He let out a sigh as he looked down to find Steve standing beside his chair, his claws lightly scratching across the wooden floor and big head slightly tilting to the right as he looked up at him. For a moment that seemed to stretch on forever, they stared at each other before Steve moved forward, lowering himself to Dream's feet, the weight of his head a comforting pressure as he rested it on his lap.

This time, when Dream took the fork back into his hand, it was easier. Steve's fur tickled his arms every time he accidentally brushed it against him, and the warmth radiating off of him was enough to keep Dream grounded. Each bite made the weight in Dream's stomach shift around and the sick feeling didn't vanish but he managed to get down most of the food on his plate and the small smile that teared at the edges of Techno's lips at the end of breakfast was worth the heavy feeling in his guts, he decided.

Techno didn't seem to have much to do today. Dream helped him fix a hole in the fence surrounding their cabin, build out the stables for the horses and collect wood for the fire place. Breakfast had given him back energy. The constant tremor in his body and the weak feeling in his legs were gone. No one said a word, and Dream didn't think he could talk even if he wanted to. So they both stayed quiet, the snow around them making the silence all too consuming.

He felt a bit silly following Techno around like a lost puppy, but at the same time it gave him a

glimpse of normality, a wisp of older times where the simple act of breathing didn't use to suck all the energy out of him. It was nice and almost enough to get rid of the cold numbness still frazzling the edges of his soul and the stain of existence that was untying his will to stay – almost.

Because no matter what he did, he couldn't shake off the waves of sadness that would seemingly come out of nowhere, wash over him and freeze his heart. The normality of the situation, it made a dull ache carve into his soul. It wasn't nostalgia for it was too painful to be just that. It was much more than that, went much deeper and forced him to press his hands against his chest, right over his core, in a futile attempt to calm the surge of sorrow.

It came with the feeling of tears pricking in his eyes, but they never escaped, only blurring his vision and making his lip quiver for a split second before he bit down hard enough to draw blood.

Out on the fields behind the cabin, icy wind and snow seeping through his clothes despite the cloak out of thick sheep wool Techno had lend him, he felt like standing in a box of glass, separated from the rest of the world. The coldness of deep winter, the biting wind, the crunching snow and aegean blue of the sky didn't feel as intense as they used to and the warm rays of the sun weren't enough to slip under his skin.

He felt like a ghost, stuck between the realms of living and eternal abyss.

He was always in touch with Techno in some way, either holding his hand or connecting their shoulders as if Techno could keep him from slipping away from the world. It was pathetic, but Dream feared he would crumble even more if he let go of him. And yet again he realized that maybe he wasn't ready to let go of whatever he had just yet.

Techno pulled him back into the cabin when his nose turned red and his teeth began to clatter. He poured them tea from the herbs Dream knew Niki sent Techno from time to time, and ignited a fire in the living room.

"I gotta finish some stuff," Techno explained, sitting down in front of the desk he loved so much. It was made of dark wood, graced with carvings of Greek mythologies. Back when Dream first got out of prison and was still recovering, he often used to sit next to Techno while he was working and if Techno wasn't too busy he'd let Dream point at a few of the carvings and told him the story behind it.

Dream sat down on the chair beside Techno's, reaching out and swiping over the surface. Icarus' wings stretching out to Apollo's searing grace as Poseidon's sea roared underneath him; a mortal crumbling to stone under the eyes of snakes twisting and winding on Medusa's head; a fire dancing on the palm of Prometheus hand, the shadows of an eagle announcing his doom. The carved wood was rough under the pads of Dream's fingers, splinters digging into his flesh but he didn't flinch away.

He sat there for a while, watching the flames of the fireplace throw shadows against the walls of the living room while Techno was busy filling a piece of paper with black ink. Dream only caught bits and pieces of what he was writing. Something about a *Syndicate* and *staying low*. Dream didn't pay much attention to it. He grew restless after a while, getting up and striding up and down the rows of shelves along the walls, marveling at the books and their grand spines.

Another wave of sadness hit him so suddenly, he almost doubled over. It was intense enough to bring physical pain, tugging and tearing at his heart until it felt like it was bleeding. He let his gaze wander around the room. It didn't feel real, being here after everything that had happened. Everything felt wrong and off.

In a way, he was glad that Techno had dragged him out of bed, otherwise he would've drowned in self-pity and loath. But at the same time he felt drained. He sunk back down on the chair next to Techno's, exhaustion making his eyelids droop. After being in bed for days on end, being this active – even if it was only for a few hours – had drained him completely.

When he slowly became aware of his surroundings again, there was a warmth covering his body and something soft under his head. He shifted, groggily trying to blink the haziness of sleep away. A blanket that someone had pulled over his sleeping form fell away as he moved around too much. He looked up, meeting the back of a book Techno was holding up above him. His head was lying in his friend's lap, the rest of his body draped over the couch.

“Look who's awake,” Techno teased, but it fell short by the soft tone of his voice as he glanced down at him. “You fell asleep. Thought the couch would probably be better for your back than the desk.”

Dream nodded absently, expression pulling into a frown. He was sweeping through his brain, looking for the traces of a nightmare but he couldn't find any. Instead, to his surprise, there was a sliver of rest.

“You good?”

Dream nodded a second time. Techno's gaze stayed on him for a moment, doubt flickering over his face before he tucked it away. “If you say so. Get up and put on your cloak. I wanna show you something.”

It was snowing outside. Dream let the flakes settle on his skin, the cold quickly seeping into his bones before Techno wrapped the cloak tighter around his body with a soft but firm pull. Their eyes met for a split second before Dream looked away, gaze fixating onto the ground where his feet dug small dents into the thick layers of snow.

Techno was heading towards the forest entrance where the tree branches swung and swayed up and down as if bowing to the newcomers. It was still freezing even with the cloak, but Dream didn't protest. He didn't complain when they walked and walked without a destination in sight, when the snow drenched his shoes and his feet grew sore from the exertion. The trust Dream had in Techno was pure and raw, blind and strong. And so, Dream silently followed Techno deeper into the woods until the canopy of leaves protected them from the falling snowflakes.

When they finally stopped, they were standing in a small clearing, the trees blocking out most of the twilight and plunging the atmosphere into something dim, almost comforting. Here in the shadows of the forest, the snow had begun to slowly melt, dripping from leaves and branches and collecting in form of small puddles in the mud to their feet.

“Catch.”

Dream's reflexes kicked in before his mind could register what was happening, hands tightly wrapping around the item Techno had thrown at him. The moment he recognized the harsh wood under his palms he let go, the blanket of leaves dampening the collision between sword and ground.

“No.” It was cool, firm, simple; a final decision that didn't leave any room for arguing. Techno

ignored it.

“Come on, Dream. You and me, just like old times.”

A few months ago, that would've made him smile, would've left a bittersweet taste on the tip of his tongue; a wisp of the dust covered arenas and blood and sweat and hunger to fight, to compete and win.

But now, the words felt etching against his skin. The nostalgia had turned into coarse pain.

“I can't.”

“Why not.”

“I can't. I'm too-” For a fleeting moment, he faltered before continuing, spitting out the word before it could form a knot in his throat and suffocate him, “*weak.*”

Techno seemed unimpressed as he simply crooked his brow and tilted his head to the side. It made a new emotion well up inside Dream but he couldn't place it, didn't have a name for it just yet.

“Weak, huh?” Techno mused, hand gliding over the handle of his own sword.

Dream bristled, “Yes.”

“Why do you think that?”

“Are you stupid? Because—” *Because?*

Because Quackity had won. He'd come back and taken him again, had picked him apart and torn his soul into shattered fragments. He had forced him to his hands and knees. He had taken everything from him. And Dream had let him.

“Is that it?” Techno's eyes dug into his skin, forcing him to meet his gaze. “Are you just going to give up. After everything that happened? Out of everyone you let *Quackity* break you? Quackity is only winning because you let him.”

Techno's words made something inside Dream snap. A foreign force surged through his veins as his face twisted into something ugly, burning, “So what? Am I not allowed to break? I fought back! I fought back so many times! And where did that lead me? To even more pain, even more torture!” He didn't mean to shout at Techno, but the screams had escaped him before he could stop them and something shifted in his chest, dislodged and left him lightheaded. There was a fine line between the mountains of despair and the chasm of anger and Dream was tipping.

Techno had gone oddly quiet, a strange expression having settled itself across his face as he just stood there, letting Dream's words rain down on him.

“I'm fucking tired, Technoblade! Don't I deserve a break? Don't I deserve to fucking rest for once? I can't do this anymore! I don't *want* to do this anymore! Is it that what you want to hear?” He threw his head back, eyes widened as he stared up into the silence and the shadows of the forest. “I give up!”

Technoblade stayed silent for moment, letting the seconds pass by as he watched him with a guarded expression, eyes narrowing slightly. “What are you feeling, Dream?”

Dream scoffed, “I feel pathetic, weak, stupid-”

“No,” Techno cut in, sternly, “What are you *really* feeling, right this second. Tell me.”

“I-” Dream paused, swallowing thickly. “I feel...angry.”

“Dream,” Techno said and *oh*, maybe it was possibly for him to break a tiny bit more. He looked back down to the warrior in front of him, took in the soft smile that graced his lips. “Let it out.”

Hesitantly, Dream crouched down, his fingers darting over the forest floor before getting a grip on the wooden sword, the dark oak skillfully carved into a fine, sharp blade and a sturdy handle.

“Come on, Smiley,” Techno said, the traces of a chuckle echoing in his voice. “Show me what you got.”

Techno didn’t give him time to think, bringing down his sword the moment Dream got back to his feet and straightened his posture. Despite not having trained since he left Techno and came to Kinoko, pure instincts and raw adrenaline got him to react even without a warning. Dream yanked his own sword up over his head, meeting Techno’s blade half way.

And as wood clashed against wood, a dam broke. Deeply buried fury and cutting rage stood behind every swing and every hit as Dream and Techno danced around each other. He was panting, muscles aching under the strain and soreness spreading through his body, but he clenched his jaw and bit down on his lip, pushing himself harder.

“I’m not weak,” he chocked out between blocking a strike and leaping forward to get a blow on Techno’s unprotected side. He didn’t miss the smirk that flashed across Techno’s face. “I’m not weak, I’m not pathetic.” He continued with every hit he delivered, voice growing louder to drown out the sounds of wooden blades colliding. “I’m not a fucking *mutt*!”

His eyes met Techno’s over the tips of their crossing swords but his vision reached beyond; black hair tainted by blood, a scar dividing flesh and tearing through mouth and eye, a power hungry look tearing into him.

“You took everything from me!” He didn’t try to stop or hold himself back anymore, letting the anger consume him and the words rip themselves out of his throat. The screams left his lips and filled the quiet forest air, lingering there as the gravity of what he was saying spurned him on to keep going. “It’s all your fault! You ripped me apart, marred my flesh and skin and tainted my blood! But I’m still here, I’m still breathing. You didn’t win, not as long as I’m alive. As long as my friends are at my side and you are alone! You did not win!”

His lungs were burning but it felt good, liberating. He pulled back his sword only to bring it back down, putting all his strength into it, knowing he wouldn’t be able to hurt Techno even if he wanted it.

The dam had broken, the current taking the weight that had been crushing him all this time with it. He hadn’t felt this light in ages.

He was long out of breath when a strong blow from Techno’s side swept the ground away from under his feet and he fell onto his back, heaving and sucking in the freezing air. He closed his eyes and let his body go limp. The sword slipped out of his grasp into a heap of brown and orange leaves. A rustling and panting beside him indicated that Techno had lowered himself to the ground as well. They bathed in the silence for an endless moment, exhaustion taking over their bones.

Dream opened his eyes, turning his head and meeting Techno’s. A wheeze broke out, spilling over split lips. It was bordering hysteria but he didn’t try to stop it.

Loosing had never felt like more of a victory than in that moment.

His friends came back when the sun was long gone and darkness had spread like a blanket across the sky. Dream had been sitting on the couch, hands buried in Steve's fur to calm the trepidation flowing through his veins.

He stood up when the sound of a door opening and then closing echoed through the cabin and footsteps neared the living room. The nervousness and anxiety vanished the second he laid eyes on the newcomers.

"Patches," he breathed out, crossing the room with big strides.

Carefully he took the cat from George's hands, not missing the look of surprise his friends shot in Techno's direction at Dream's presence downstairs and not in bed for once. He ignored it for now in order to cradle Patches against his chest, threading his fingers through her soft fur. The familiar buzz of her purring calmed him down and the tension slipped from his muscles.

"Hey," he cooed, being rewarded with a small meow.

The soft smile on his face fell into a frown after a few seconds. He spoke up without looking at any of his friends, "You went to Kinoko Kingdom?"

"We had a few of Phil's crows and armor and weapons with us," George said.

Dream nodded, the small surge of anxiety turning back into relief as he turned his entire attention back to Patches. He nuzzled his face into her fur, relishing in the warmth and comfort that blossomed in his chest as she blinked up at him and gave a deep purr.

The tender moment between him and his cat didn't last forever, and someone clearing their throat pulled him back into reality. All eyes were on him, making him shift uncomfortable under the intensity.

"I uh-" his voice broke and he clenched his hands into a fist, pushing down the urge to dig his fingernails into the skin of his palms.

Deep breaths, he thought. It couldn't be that hard. He'd been going through what he wanted to say a million times over in his head when him and Techno came back from the forest to make sure he didn't mess something up once his friends were back.

But now, actually facing the situation and moments away from having to say something, his throat was tight and mouth dry. He coughed, drawing in a breath before looking up, meeting every single gaze of his friends, no matter how heavy it was. Techno stepped up to his side, giving him an encouraging nod.

"I'm not doing good," he finally said, voice surprisingly steady, despite the shake in his hands. "I want to get better but I can't do it alone. I need your help."

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Healing is a long and hard journey. But at least Dream isn't alone.

TW: Slight mention of depressive and suicidal thoughts

Chapter Notes

I'm very sorry about the irregular upload schedule for the last two chapters. My beta reader was very busy. But they did an amazing job and I'm very thankful for their help. (If anyone wants to check out his fanfics, I linked his account in the notes of the first chapter. They have a few awesome fanfics as well :D)

And hey, somehow my upload schedule was still more consistent than the new episodes of the Banter Podcast lmfao

Fun fact, this fanfic is now only a few hundred words shorter than the first Harry Potter book so uh...that's a lot, holy shit-

Also, new manhunt today WOHOOO! So excited for it!

Enjoy the last chapter, I really hope you like it :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The phantom feeling of hands wrapped around his throat was still there when he woke up, lungs starved of air after having screamed so much.

“Dream. Hey it's me, George. You're safe.”

“George,” he gasped, hands blindly reaching out to the familiar voice in front of him. His chest was trembling with every breath, sweat forming on his forehead and sticking his hair to his skin. Thick confusion enveloped him, almost suffocating him as his eyes frantically darted around the room, not being able to focus on anything longer than a few seconds before moving on.

“-Just a nightmare, Dream,” George mumbled somewhere to his right. “You aren't in prison anymore. We're in Techno's cabin, remember?”

Hesitantly, Dream nodded, still trying to blink away the fog of sleep and nightmares muddling his brain. His hands were shaking and his chest felt too tight.

“Is it okay if I touch you?”

He nodded again, feeling the mattress give under George's weight as he sat down on the bed. Fingers touched his shoulders before pausing, giving him time to pull away. His first instinct was to flinch and get away, but the moment the thought could form, self-hatred flared up and he tried to swallow the urge back down.

“Hey, none of that.” Sometimes, it scared Dream how well George could read him. “It’s okay if you can’t do touch right now, Dream.”

“I-,” his voice broke, hoarse from screaming his throat raw in his sleep. “No, it’s fine. I actually...” He took a deep breath, clenching his hands into fists to stop the tremors. “Can you just... hold me?”

It was getting easier, accepting help. On bad days, he still struggled, still fought with the urge to push everyone away and hide under the covers of his bed till the world stopped spinning. His friends were always there though, there to make sure and point out every small improvement, every turn into the right direction on his way of recovery. It helped him, more than he liked to admit.

“Of course, Dreamie.” Through bleary eyes he could see George smile softly as arms carefully wrapped around him and pulled him up until his head rested on George’s chest. “Wanna talk about it?”

Dream let his mind wander for a moment, going back to the darkness of his dream, but all he remembered was the sensation of blood running down his skin and bottomless despair.

“I don’t really remember much,” he quietly confessed into the fabric of George’s shirt. His lover didn’t press further, only letting out a thoughtful hum. Fingers came up, running through his disheveled hair and detangling the strands that had gotten caught up in each other during sleep.

“Okay,” George muttered after letting the silence linger for a while. “You think you’re still up for tonight? It’s okay if you’re not.”

Immediately Dream shook his head, burying his face deeper into George’s chest. “No, I’m good. I’m definitely not gonna miss tonight.”

George seemed hesitant at first, the fingers in his hair pausing for a second before continuing the calming motion. “If you’re sure. I honestly don’t-”

“George,” Dream whined, effectively cutting him off. “It was just a nightmare. I’ll be fine.”

“I know.” George sighed, worry seeping into his voice. “But it’s been a while since you had one.”

Dream bit his lip, guilt infesting his conscience. George was right. He hadn’t had a single nightmare since last week, and the thought that they might come back made his gut churn with unease. But he also didn’t want to miss tonight, having looked forward to it for such a long time now and Karl’s retellings of memories he hadn’t been able to participate in had only spurred on his excitement.

“George,” he said, looking up to meet the brunette’s anxious eyes. He raised a hand, pushing his palm against George’s cheek, giving him the softest sliver of a smile. “I’m good, I promise. And if anything happens, I still got you, right?”

George opened his mouth as if to throw a protest in, but Dream craned his neck up to press their lips together. It was quick and the position he was in a tad too awkward, but when he pulled back he could see a glistening in his lover’s eyes. George caved in.

“Fine, but if it gets too much, I won’t hesitate to drag you all the way back home.”

Dream’s smile twisted into a smirk, “bet.”

George rolled his eyes, although even he couldn’t stop a few chuckles from escaping. “Come here, idiot,” he laughed, pulling him back up to meet his lips again. Dream’s smile didn’t fade as he

melted against him.

Drops of water dripped down from where the faucet was leaking. The sun was nearing the horizon, pale yellow being replaced by soft pink and orange hues. Dream was standing in the kitchen, one hand occupied with holding a glass of water while the other was absently rubbing over his shoulder blade, the pain of an old wound flaring up again. It was the ghost of his past, sitting in his bones, under his flesh, carved into his skin, lurking, waiting for days to haunt his body and cloud his mind with memories of rusty knives and biting whips. And there was nothing he could do to stop himself from remembering.

He sighed, putting the glass onto the kitchen counter in favor of bringing his finger up to his temples, trying to chase the ache away that was sitting under his skin. The slight pounding of an upcoming headache crept closer.

“Hey, mate.”

“Shit-” He almost knocked over the glass of water with his elbow at how hard he flinched at the sudden voice filling the kitchen. He snapped around to see Phil in the door frame, face scrunched into a guilty expression.

“Sorry,” the older winced. “Didn’t mean to startle you! That was my bad.”

Dream just shrugged, nervously fidgeting with the hem of his sweater as Phil entered the kitchen and moved over to the fridge.

“Old injury?” Phil asked when he was right beside him, pointing to the sore spot on his shoulder Dream had been trying to sooth earlier. Dream nodded sheepishly, hand coming back up to self-consciously shield the spot away from Phil’s eyes even though it was already covered by the fabric of his clothes.

Phil didn’t comment further on it, only acknowledging it with a curt nod. “George said you had a nightmare earlier,” he spoke up again after a few seconds of silence, head turned away from him but Dream didn’t need to see his face to know the worried expression he held. “Are you doing alright?”

Dream let a loud exhale escape, leaning against the kitchen counter. His shoulders slumped and lips twisted downwards with sour guilt. “Yeah. I hope I didn’t wake any of you up. I’m really sorry.”

This time, Phil’s head did turn around to him. “Dream, we’ve been over this. It’s normal to have a few steps back on your way of recovery. You can’t expect it to be a straight line towards getting better.”

“I know,” Dream ensured, earning a doubtful glare. Phil studied him quietly and Dream chewed on the inside of his cheek, cursing himself internally for not guarding his emotions and thoughts well enough. Although, he knew it was pointless in front of Phil. The man could read humans with an effortlessness that would make even the most powerful gods jealous.

Dream sighed, “It’s just... Sometimes it doesn’t feel like I get better at all. One day I’m completely fine and laugh and hang out with you guys, and then the next day I can’t even get out of bed.”

He averted his eyes to the ground. He knew no one would get mad at him – if anything, they’d be happy that he opened up about his feelings to them, something he was still having a hard time with – but he still felt bad for bothering Phil with his problems.

“Prime, Dream,” Phil mumbled. “You’re already doing so much better than we expected of you after such a short amount of time. You already ask for help much more than you used to, and we see how hard you try to get better. We are proud of you for that. Don’t be too hard on yourself, mate.”

Dream still felt doubt claw at his insides. Logically, he knew things wouldn’t just magically go back to how they used to be, but every bad day he had made him more and more frustrated. He wanted to get better, so why was he still flinching away from loud noises and unpredictable movements? Why did he still sometimes feel like dying, even though his friends were doing everything they could to make him feel better?

“Can I show you something?” Phil cut off the train of anxious thoughts that threatened to overwhelm him.

Dream nodded, uncertainty already building up inside of him. Carefully, he watched as Phil raised his hands to unclip the heavy cloak that flowed from his shoulders like fluid obsidian. The dark fabric fell to the floor with a dull thud.

Slowly, Phil spread out his wings from where he’d tucked them under, had cradled them to his back like they would dissolve into nothing but feathers if not kept close and protected by him. The feathers were painted in shades of black and gray, glimmering when they caught the light of the dying sun just right; as if Phil had plucked the wings right out of the end himself, sprinkled with stars staring out of the dark void.

Dream opened his mouth, but the words died in his throat when his eyes landed on his right wing. The feathers were bent in unnatural ways, the tip of the wing burnt. Flesh and skin and feathers withering away to a sight of pale bones and carved skeleton.

“Fuck, Phil. I-”

“It’s fine.” The smile on Phil’s lips was weak but sincere. “I won’t lie to you, mate. Sometimes it still hurts and I’ll get this sudden urge out of seemingly nowhere; a dull ache deep inside my chest, a longing that doesn’t want to go away even after years of living with it.” Phil’s firm gaze yielded to something hazy, as if he was no longer standing in the kitchen but somewhere else, in another time. “I miss the feeling of wind beneath my wings and clouds under my fingertips. It’s a part of me that’s gone now, and I can either choose to mourn it for the rest of my life or learn how to adjust myself around the empty spot inside me.”

His eyes came back into focus, pinning Dream in place, but the younger stood his ground and met the older's gaze with silent veneration as he continued to listen.

“Wounds like this don’t just... heal. They never truly do, but grieving over something that is long gone won’t bring it back. The only thing you can do is learn how to live with it. It gets easier with time, I promise you that, even if it may take a while.” Phil’s smile grew comforting and warm. “And you do not have to go through it on your own. We’re here for you, Dream. And we will help you, we will be here for every step you take forward and every step backwards that it takes to move towards recovery.”

Dream didn’t say anything for a while, letting seconds bleed into minutes. “Gods, Phil. Stop talking or you’re gonna make me cry.” A wet laugh followed his words and Phil threw his head back, letting out a loud cackle as he pulled his wings back.

“I take it my great monologue helped and you’re feeling better now?”

Dream nodded, crooked smile still present on his face as he swiftly wiped his hands over his eyes.

“Good. I’m gonna go get ready now. We are leaving in about ten minutes.”

Casting back one last look, Phil left the kitchen. Dream pressed his lips together, running a hand through his hair to put himself back together and get a better grip on his emotions.

“Well,” he whispered to himself. “Didn’t know the old man could get all deep and shit.”

A knock against the open door told him that he was yet again not alone and he spun around to look at the newcomer.

“Talking to yourself again? You’re weird, man,” Karl giggled. “I was looking for you to tell you to get ready. We’ll be leaving soon.”

“I know. Phil just told me.”

“Of course.” Karl’s face contorted into a frown as he picked at his cuticles. Dream was quiet, giving Karl some time to collect his thoughts and make up his mind over whether there was still something else he wanted to share.

“Dream?”

“Yes, Karl?”

“I uh, wanted to give you this back.” His hands slipped into the pocket of his dark purple cloak before he pulled it back out, fingers tightly grasping something Dream couldn’t see. Karl took a deep breath before opening his hand and showing Dream the content on his outstretched palm. “I wanted to give it to you much earlier but there was just never the right time and then I kind of forgot and I-”

“Karl,” Dream said, not wanting to let the other get lost in his rambling. Karl stopped, looking up at him. His shoulders slouched with relief when he saw his soft expression. “Thank you.”

Dream lifted his hand to grab the black, green ribbon Karl had given him what felt like forever ago but he stopped himself, sheepishly blinking down at Karl. “Want to put it in my hair? You are way better at it than I am.”

The sheer joy radiating off Karl made Dream’s heart almost combust from how light and warm it felt as he lowered himself on one of the chairs next to the dining table to give Karl better access to his hair. It was just like he remembered it from the first time. Karl’s hands were skilled and deft as he parted Dream’s hair and wove his strands together. His fingers scratched across his scalp, making Dream relax against the back of the chair with a small sigh. He closed his eyes, basking in the tranquility of the moment and relishing in the warmth of Karl’s presence and the grounding weight of his hands running through his hair.

Patches joined them after a while, claws clicking across the wooden tiles before she jumped into Dream’s lap without any invitation. She meowed at him demandingly, pushing her head into his palm until he had no other choice than to pat her.

Karl began to hum a sweet melody as he continued combing through his hair, pulling it together into a beautiful braid before decorating it with the ribbon. When he was finished, Dream admired his work in the reflection of one of the windows. “It’s beautiful, Karl. Thank you.”

“No problem.” Karl was beaming and Dream didn’t even hesitate, pulling the older into a strong

embrace. The amount of love for his friends he carried around was tugging at his heart in the sweetest way.

Unfortunately, they had to let go of the hug as Techno stuck his head into the kitchen, reminding them that they had to leave soon. Everyone else was already waiting for them when they stepped out into the hallway. Techno was at Dream's side in an instant, hand resting on his shoulder as he caught his gaze. "You okay, Smiley?"

Dream didn't have to ask what he meant. "Yeah. Just a nightmare. George was there. I'm alright, I promise."

Techno narrowed his eyes before letting it go, connecting their foreheads together. "Okay."

"For Piglins it means something like 'I see you, you see me, and we are in this together,'" Techno had said to him once.

He cared – they all did. It was one of the toughest things for Dream to realize; that they were helping him because they *wanted* to. He wasn't an inconvenience, he wasn't a burden they found annoying to deal with. He was their friend, and they would do whatever they could to get him back to his feet.

Dream pushed his forehead further against Techno's.

Right then, Sapnap just had to open his mouth because he really couldn't let a tender moment stay on its own, "Who knew Technoblade could be such a softie."

Techno pulled away from Dream, teeth grinding together and one of his tusks almost splitting his lip as he glared down at Sapnap, "I will literally murder you in your sleep and use your intestines to hang your dead corpse off the roof."

"Jeez," Sapnap muttered, jumping back a bit.

"Alright," Phil clapped his hands together, stopping their banter before it could escalate. "Let's go. Before we are late."

The smell of burning wood, herbs, and sweet wine drifted in the air as they neared the village that was buzzing with the night festivities that had already begun. It was dark, making the explosions of color more vivid as adults and children danced around the town square, swirling and hopping to the music echoing over their heads.

It had taken a lot of begging from Dream to convince Phil that it would be fine to leave the safety of their cabin for one night. His crows still stayed close. George could see them on the rooftops and in the branches of trees surrounding the area. And just in case, they all had their weapons and armor stored in their inventories.

But George didn't want to think about it. They were here to have fun, to loose themselves in the music and crowds of people and the blue and purple tents that sold honeyed whiskey and almonds sprinkled in gold down at the lake.

They had almost reached the entrance when George looked over to where Dream was leaning on

Techno, whispering something into his ear before throwing his head back and letting out one of his signature wheezes.

George groaned. Annoyance welling up as his veins burned with the ugly, jealous feeling yet again. He tried to push it away, not wanting to let it ruin his night, but it didn't want to go away. He furrowed his brows, stopping mid-walk.

"You okay, Georgie?" Of course Dream had noticed. He was way too observant for his own sake sometimes.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"You're lying. Why did you stop?"

George huffed, turning away from his lover as a blush spread across his cheeks. It was embarrassing. He *knew* how stupid it was, but somehow he couldn't stop it.

"Doesn't matter," he muttered, kicking a stone away with his foot. Dream didn't budge.

"Oh come on," he said, his tone lighthearted. "Tell me!"

George ran his hands over his face that felt hot to his touch, futilely trying to control the blush raising. "It's Techno," he rushed out under his breath. For a moment he thought Dream hadn't heard him. Unfortunately, he didn't seem to have such luck.

"Techno? Why-" Dream paused. George stared at him, hoping Dream figured it out on his own and he wouldn't have to explain further. He swore he could see the gears turn in Dream's head. For a moment he was quiet. Then it clicked.

"George, are you-" His eyes widened as he looked at George who flushed an even darker shade of red. "Are you jealous of him?" He almost choked on his laughter, hands coming down to hold his stomach as his lungs deflated.

"Stop, it's not funny," George weakly tried to calm down his lover, eyes nervously darting over to where his friends were standing in front of the entrance to the village, waiting for them. He didn't want them to hear. It was already embarrassing enough. He wanted to be mad at Dream for laughing at his pain, but he didn't even remember the last time he'd seen him this happy. His eyes were glimmering, lips stretched into the widest grin, the bonfire in the distance throwing pale orange and red flakes against his skin and George had to suppress his own smile. Gods, it was hard to stay mad at him.

"George," Dream managed to push out between snickers. "You do realize he's just trying to get a reaction out of you, right?"

George stilled, "What?"

Dream nodded, voice laced with mirth, "He finds it funny to make you jealous."

"I-"

Dream tilted his head to the side, mustering him. His expression morphed into something more serious but his tone was kept light as he spoke up again, "You didn't actually think I'd leave you for him, right?"

"No, of course not." George cleared his throat, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

"I love you, George. You know that. Techno and I are just friends, I promise."

"I know, Dream," George assured him, gripping his waist and pulling him closer. "I don't know why I was jealous. It's stupid. I'm sorry."

Dream leaned in, packing him on the lips and the gentleness of it almost made George melt right there and then.

"You know," Dream mumbled, face pulled into a calculated expression. "I know Techno can be intimidating sometimes but I swear, in reality, he's just like a big, soft polar bear or something"

"A polar bear? Really, Dream?" He lifted his brows, looking at Dream in disbelief but the blonde nodded enthusiastic, giving him the brightest grin, all teeth and glinting eyes.

"Yeah, like Steve."

"You're an idiot."

Dream chuckled lowly, "Seriously, though. You two would probably make really good friends if you just talked to each other for once. And I mean *really* talk. Like two grown adults who don't glare at each other like they are mere seconds away from murdering the other. Actually," he said, tapping one finger against George's chest. "How about you try and talk to him tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Yes. Ask him to show you a few tricks with the sword in exchange for some tips regarding bows." George was about to shake his head and make it very clear that he did not want to go through with what Dream said, but the blonde pouted, shooting him a stern look that didn't leave any room for protest.

"Fine," George huffed, being rewarded with a big smile. He rolled his eyes.

When they caught up to their friends, Karl and Sapnap didn't waste a second before taking Dream's hands and dragging him to the big bonfire in the center of the village.

George stayed behind, awkwardly standing next to Techno. The Piglin Hybrid was staring off into the distance, face completely void of emotions. It took George a few minutes of uncomfortable silence before he finally collected enough courage to speak up.

'I hate you, Dream,' he thought as he swallowed hard, turning to Techno. "Hey uh," He cleared his throat, trying his best to hold eye contact as the crimson gaze flickered down to him. Anxiety made his skin itch. "Are you maybe up for some training tomorrow? You could show me some tricks with the sword and I could show you some with the bow?"

"Sure."

George blinked, "What?"

"Why not." Techno shrugged, his gaze turning back to where Dream and Sapnap were dancing together, giggling like children as they twisted and spun around each other. The stoic expression on Techno's face faded into something soft, something that happened a lot around Phil or Dream, George had noticed. "He's having fun."

"Yeah," George smiled, "He looks happy."

When the moon reached its highest point, they joined the villagers down at the lake that bordered on the sea.

Dream was already crouching on the small beach, one hand holding a water lantern Phil had bought him. The dim moonlight threw shadows onto his face but his dark green eyes were glistening like emeralds in the night. His cheeks were flushed, hair messy and a few strands from his braid had come loose from all the dancing and jumping around with Karl and Sapnap earlier.

George's breath caught in his throat as he stopped in his tracks and stared. Because there he was; Dream – *his* Dream. A raw force of glee and mirth and hotheadedness. From his bright smile all the way to his sparkling eyes. His Dream, who was reckless and adventurous and jumped across trees and cliffs as if he could bend the world around his will. His Dream, who'd been in hiding for so long and was now, with the help of his friends, slowly learning that it was safe to come out of his shelter. A splinter of him was gone, would probably never return back to him but the other part of him was still there, despite all the pain and bloodshed. He had survived, carefully breaking through the deep layers of snow like a flower finding its way back up to the light.

George stepped closer, mouth already opening to say something when he was hit with a splash of water. "Dream!" he shrieked, jumping back. "Gods, you are so annoying. You're an idiot." Yep, that was undeniably *his* Dream.

Dream got up from his crouching position, thanks to his height now slightly looming over him. "Yeah, but I'm your idiot."

An overwhelming urge overcame George, growing in his chest before forcing its way up his throat and out of his mouth before he could even think about what he was about to say.

"I love you," he blurted out, eyes widened as he stared up at Dream who blinked at him, surprise clear on his features. It took both of them a few seconds to process what George had said.

"I know," Dream said, lips spreading into a smirk.

"I hate you." He didn't. He couldn't help his own smile from overtaking him. He was incredibly thankful that Dream hadn't made it uncomfortable and awkward, knowing that George was already nervous about saying it in the first place. He loved him, he really did.

"Come on," Dream pulled him out of his thoughts, nodding down to lantern he was still holding. "Help me with it."

Karl and Sapnap crouched down right next to them, having a lantern of their own while Techno was standing a few feet away with Phil, silently watching them. George swore he saw the ghost of a smile on his face before he turned back around to focus on Dream.

The lantern glided into the water with ease, swapping back and forth with the small waves that softly crashed against the beach before Dream nudged it further out. George grabbed Dream's hand as they slowly stood back up.

They would be okay, George thought, squeezing Dream's hand. Dream squeezed back. A cool breeze rustled the leaves of a nearby tree, soothing their heated skins as they watched the light of their lantern sail into the night.

And thus, it comes to an end.

I have already talked about it once but English is not my first language and even though I used to write a lot when I was younger, I haven't been able to write anything in the last couple of years because of school and mental health reasons. It pained me because writing was always something I loved. So starting with this big of a project after such a longer break was probably not the smartest idea haha. But I did it. I finished it. And I am so fucking proud of it. Something that is very rare. I can't express how thankful I am for every comment and kudo. I did not expect this fanfic to gain so much attention and for so many people to click on it. I still can't believe it. But you guys gave me the motivation to push through the doubts and negative thoughts I had while writing it and for that I wanna thank you so much <3

I'm sad that it has to come to an end now BUT that doesn't mean that it has to be completely over just yet :)

The next thing I will do is work on another fanfic. It's gonna be mostly a comfort fanfic where I project onto my favorite green blob lmao. If anyone is interested, feel free to stick around. But then, after that is finished, I do want to write a sequel. I just need some time to recollect my thoughts and find more ideas. I know the whole 'Dream breaks out of prison and is confronted by the server' thing has been done plenty of times by now. I need new ideas that haven't been done already. And I already have a few ideas actually but if anyone wants to make a few suggestions, the comments are open :) Can't guarantee that I will be able to include all of your guys' ideas but maybe I will get a few inspirations.

Anygay, thank you so much for sticking along. It was an honor to share my work with you guys. You have been very sweet.

Love you (parasocially ofc) and take care of yourself <3

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!